8

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LAMBERT BARTELS

OROMO RELIGION

Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia – An Attempt to Understand

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the Oromo People
and especially to those among them
who helped me to write this book

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The author

SOME INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS ABOUT THE MATCHA OROMO AND ABOUT THIS BOOK

Chapter 1

THE OROMO – A FIRST GLANCE

1. A great and numerous people

Among the many peoples living within the borders of present-day Ethiopia the Oromo constitute easily the most numerous. If, for lack of a reliable census, we estimate the country's total population to be 28 millions, and assuming that the Oromo account for 35 % of this figure, then they must number about 10 millions. To the best of my knowledge, this makes them one of the most numerous peoples in the whole of Africa.

They form a large majority in seven out of the fourteen provinces (nowadays called 'regions') of Ethiopia, and in other provinces they account for a significant minority. Much of the country's best land is Oromoland.

2. Tribes and clans

The Oromo people constitute various groups which, for centuries, were composed almost exclusively of tribes or confederations of tribes. The tribes, in their turn, were divided into sub-tribes, the sub-tribes into clans, and the clans into lineages.

Relations between these groups were often fraught with dispute in the past. For the last centuries, indeed, they did not succeed in achieving any extensive form of political unity. Only after they had been made subject to the christian emperor Menelik II (between 1880 and 1894) was peace established between the combative Oromo clans themselves or between their rival petty 'kings' who, for some time before Menelik's conquest, had marked the political scene.

As a result of this peace, friendly contacts between the various groups and moves by individual people between the regions became more and more frequent, so that, nowadays, Oromo of different clan and tribal affiliations are scattered everywhere among the locally dominant clans.

3. Economy

Generally speaking it can be said that, in the highlands, Oromo economies are based on a mixture of agriculture (grain-crops and coffee) and animal husbandry (cattle, sheep, goats and poultry). In the lowlands they live as pastoralists. Where both types of land are to be

found, we observe mixed types of economy, so that often within one family agriculturists and herders may be found.

The Oromo of the Harar region in the extreme east, and also the Tulama and Matcha Oromo are farmers with only a limited number of cattle, sheep and goats. The Borana in the far south and the Raya in the extreme north are pastoralists. Among the Borana's neighbours, the Guji or Jamjam, as among the Arsi we find pure farmers, pure herdsmen and people who divide their activities between farming and cattle-herding.

4. Religion

At present we find three religions among them: their traditional religion, Islam and Christianity.

We can say that, to the Oromo, the traditional divinity is both one and, at the same time, also many. The supreme being whom they call *'Waqa'* (sky/God), is the creator of all things and the source of all life. Starting with water and rocks, going on through the vegetable and animal world to man, Waqa has appointed to every being its own place in a cosmic order of which he is also the guardian. Sin is simply a breaking of this cosmic order. Waqa's creative and ordering activity manifests itself in all things. It manifests itself in the specific characteristics of man in general, of every species of plants and every species of animals. It is manifested also in the individual characteristics of every man, of each plant and each animal taken singly. In this particularized form Waqa's creative activity is called *'ayana'*. These ayana may be personalized, feared and, at times, invoked, but, in spite of this appearance of multiplicity, each one is also seen ultimately as a manifestation of the one divinity. This view of the world is expressed in a wealth of rituals.

In regard to Islam we find in the east, that the Harar Oromo are most strongly Islamized, though the degree of Islamization differs markedly between the various groups. The impact of Islam upon the Arsi Oromo, too, is significant and can be observed to increase in proportion to their involvement in trade with the people of the Harar region and the Muslim Somali. Islam and trade have gone together in Africa again and again. Their Islamization was also encouraged by their aversion to the Christian Amharas and to the Christian Tulama Oromo who have taken over much of their best farmland.

Islam also prevails among the Raya herdsmen in the north and the Wallo tribes. A further group of Islamized Oromo are to be found to the east of Matcha Oromo territory around and to the north of the

town of Jimma. They were converted to Islam by traders from across the Blue Nile who, in their turn, had connections with the Muslims in the Harar country and along the Red Sea coast.

A further area of Islamic impact, though of minor importance, can be observed in the extreme north of western Matchaland where, for centuries, Arabic traders from the Sudan settled.

In the rest of Matchaland, in the territories of the Tulama tribes and among the northern Yeju Oromo, the rulers of the Christian empire of Ethiopia succeeded in establishing the Ethiopian Church, so that, nowadays, the majority of the population there are Christians.

However, whether they became Christians or Muslims, the Oromo's traditional modes of experiencing the divine have continued almost unaffected, in spite of the fact that several rituals and social institutions in which it was expressed, have been very diminished or apparently submerged in new rituals cloaks.

5. Social change

Apart from the Amharic domination and the influence of the two world-religions other factors have affected Oromo life in many ways. We only mention here the impact of trade and cash economy, a gradual shift from cattle-holding to agriculture, the effects of western education and technical skill, as well as urbanization and the growth of the population.

Their ancient social organization, in particular the famous *gada* system, a complicated system in which the responsability for the people's well-being was handed over from one group of people to another every eighth year, was gradually deprived by the Amharas of most of its political and judicial power and reduced to a merely ritual institution. Until the revolution in 1974, the system was best preserved among the Borana, and, to a lesser extent, among the Guji or Jamjam and part of the Arsi.

Elsewhere, for example in most parts of Matchaland, the weakening of the gada system had already happened before the Amharic conquest (1885–88) through the rise of petty 'kings' from among the Oromo themselves who, on a base of landed property, warfare and control of the trade-routes, had succeeded in dominating, in some instances, quite extensive territories. Following the Amharic conquest, these petty despotic rulers were, in their turn, either eliminated or turned into vassals of the Christian emperor.

6. Cultural unity

The Oromo then have been more divided than united politically for centuries. In their everyday life, too, we see conspicuous divergences dependant upon their being farmers or pastoralists, Christians or Muslims and on the extent to which they have come under the impact of the central government, western education and other factors. Other divergences can be traced to different tribal traditions. As a result, no group can be seen as representative of the others in any simple way.

In spite of all these factors, and taking into consideration their wide geographical spread over the country, the Oromo have also maintained a quite surprising degree of similarity in certain areas of life. This is especially true of those who live in the countryside. With the exception of a small minority who adopted Amharic as their language, Oromo speak a mutually intelligible language of their own. Kinship relations and marriage customs are much the same, and so is their attitude to leadership on one hand and to freedom of the individual on the other, the position of the nuclear family, their concept of man and society, and their modes of experiencing the divine – all things which still find expression in many rites, ceremonies and forms of social intercourse.

These features, taken one by one, are not unique in the sense that they are not to be found in other Ethiopian peoples also. It is rather the selection as a whole, the manner in which they have been grafted and absorbed by the Oromo into their way of life, and the way they grew evolved and combined that account for an obvious Oromo identity.

7. Their name

For centuries, the Oromo have been called 'Galla', though rather by non-Oromo than by themselves. Since the revolution, however, they have again claimed for themselves their ancient name 'Oromo', because of the pejorative connotations the word 'Galla' has in their eyes.

Chapter 2

THE OROMO IN PERSPECTIVE

1. One people out of many

The Oromo are by no means the only people in Ethiopia. Indeed, the country counts more than 70 different peoples. With many of these peoples the Oromo were in contact, sometimes very closely and over a long period – a situation resulting very largely from their extensive geographical spread throughout Ethiopia.

Outstanding among these other peoples are the Tigreans (5 millions?)[1] and the Amharas (6 millions?) who, for centuries, formed the bulk of the population of Ethiopia's ancient Christian empire. This empire was in contact with the Mediterranean world and the Middle East for more than two thousands years. Its people developed a script of their own. They also created a sphere of influence on the surrounding peoples long before the latter were included within the boundaries of the present Ethiopian state. It was especially the Amharas who were responsible for this work of political unification (1880–1900) thanks to their skill in warfare and their possession of a political organization strong enough to dominate other peoples.

The Gojamites (1 million?) who are living within the curve of the Blue Nile are mostly counted as Amharas. Most of them speak Amharic and they became Christians eight centuries ago. In their way of life, however, they have retained more of the customs of their Agaw ancestors than the Amhara proper.

Both in Oromoland and within the boundaries of the ancien Christian empire we find clusters of other ethnic groups who never allowed themselves to be wholly assimilated into the main group. They usually represent earlier peoples.

Apart from these clusters in Oromo-, Tigre- and Amharaland, nearly all other earlier peoples are to be found in those parts of the country where neither the Oromo nor the Amharas and Tigreans ever settled in great numbers. Which means in fact that they are found chiefly in the borderlands. Many are mainly farmers, others pastoralists, others hunters, and still others find their living in shifting cultivation, collecting vegetable food in the wilderness and a highly developed apiculture.

[1] Part of the Tigreans are living in the country's most northern region Erytrea.

Their traditional political organization, especially in the not too remote past, ranged between homesteads under the lead of an older kinsman to petty headmen and even divine kings in the full sense of the word. Among others age-grades prevailed or some form of a gada-system. Some formed rather homogeneous groups, others developed a society with several strata under the lead of a ruling class.

Physically they show all intermediary grades between the tall and pitch-black Anuak in the far south-west and their small and rather lightly coloured neighbours, the Mao.

In comparison with other peoples such as the Oromo, Amhara and Tigreans who could be rightly called the 'younger peoples of Ethiopia', these smaller ethnic groups are often called 'earlier peoples' or 'the old masters of the country', a name they give to themselves. But in this respect it is worth noticing that they themselves also differentiate between each other on this issue, or that they have folk-memories of peoples who were settled in their lands even before they themselves arrived there.

2. Problems of classification

One cannot safely classify what is unknown. Most of the peoples of Ethiopia remain less known than is popularly supposed, both by foreigners and by the Ethiopians themselves.

A number of valuable studies have already been made, both by foreigners and Ethiopians, and every year more are added to their number, but there are far too few. A result of such new publications "is invariably that they reveal with shame-making clarity how little we still know of things we thought we knew".[2]

In addition, the culture traits of all Ethiopian peoples are continually in a state of flux, and, for the last decades, even increasingly so. As a result, even the most valuable studies run a risk of being outdated to a certain extent by the date of their publication.

3. The Oromo language and other languages of Ethiopia

The Oromo speak a language which belongs to the extensive family of the so called 'Cushitic' languages. The name is derived from Cush, the biblical name for ancient Ethiopia. This ancient Ethiopia is identical with the former Nubia and with modern Sudan: the valley of the Nile between the second and the sixth cataract.

[2] P.T.W. Baxter and H.J. Blackhurst, 1977 (2).

The name 'Cushitic' for the Oromo language does not mean at all, as is sometimes suggested, that the Oromo's homeland should be looked for in that part of the Nile valley. It only says that Oromo language is of the same extended family as the one of Cush. An extended family, indeed, with many branches, extending as far as Tanzania. Most of the Cushitic languages (linguists are said to have discovered more than seventy of them) are to be found within the boundaries of present Ethiopia. They are divided into eastern and western Cushitic. Oromo language is eastern Cushitic and, as such, is akin to Somali, Afar and Saho.

In Ethiopia's extreme north, we find two purely Semitic languages, Tigre and Tigrinya. It is generally accepted that they came into existence under the influence of Arabic settlers who crossed the Red Sea allegedly during the last millenium before our era. They gradually replaced the former, presumably Cushitic, languages.

Further to the south, and under the influence of settlers from the north, several other languages have come into being which, too, by most authors are classified as Semitic, although the impact of Cushitic on them is marked. Hence also the name 'Ethiopian-Semitic'. One of these languages is the Amharic.

For all these Semitic and Ethiopian-Semitic languages the Amharic script (which was developed in Ethiopia itself) is customarily used with some adaptations.

Apart from these Cushitic, Semitic and partly Semitic languages we find throughout the country tens of other languages, as could be expected in the presence of so many earlier peoples. Some of them have not yet been classified, others are referred to only within a provisional classification.

The official language of Ethiopia is Amharic and its second English. They are the only languages taught in the schools.

Among those people who are no longer illiterate, knowledge of their own language is markedly decreasing. As one of my assistants, a young teacher, once complained when confronted with the eloquence of my older informants: "What language do we, educated people, really know? Amharic? No. English? No. We have even forgotten the language of our fathers."

Chapter 3

THE MATCHA OROMO OF THE EXTREME WEST

1. Their move westwards

In the course of the 16th century, the Oromo moved from their homeland, probably near the Ganale river, and began their migration to the south, north and west. (See map chapter 9)

The Matcha tribe moved westwards in search of new land, 'walking in the footsteps of their cattle' as they phrase it themselves. Its first pioneers must have reached the present Dembidollo area in the course of the 18th century. They called their new land 'Sayo' after a remote ancestor by whose name they also call themselves 'Sayo' or 'sons of Sayo'. The name 'Matcha' means 'people'.

Their socio-political organization was the famous *gada* system, by which the responsibility for the country's well-being was successively entrusted to five groups of people, every group including members of all clans. A son belonged always to his father's gada group or gada set. Each of these five gada sets would rule the country in turn for a period of eight years. Each set chose its own leaders, the most important of whom were: a ritual leader whose position came near to that of a high-priest (his name was *abba bokku* – holder of the scepter) with his ritual assistants, judges and a warleader. In the course of time western Matcha established several gada areas of this kind. The one in Sayoland had its ritual centre on the Gara Mao (mountain of the Mao).

In contrast with other Oromo in the east, western Matcha knew only a few grades by which a gada set gradually reached full social adulthood. The highest personal ritual of a man's life was the slaughtering of a bull in front of his house during the period of rule of his gada set. According to this system, a son was sure to succeed his father in his turn in the ruling of the country, but not until fourty years after the latter. In this way, competition for political power or office between successive generations was reduced to a minimum, as one succeeded another in a prescribed and inviolable order.

However, the gada system was more than a merely socio-political system. It was also a shrine for the Matcha's traditional view of the world and their moral values. Apart from upholding the gada laws, the gada set in power had to perform many rituals to ensure the country's well-being: fertility of people and animals, good harvests (especially through rain) and mutual peace which they considered as a condition

for *Waqa's* (God/sky) blessing. They had also to display all these things in their own life. They had to be living symbols of this blessing in the full sense of the word, which means that they had not only to be tokens of his blessing themselves but also to impart it to their people.

Not all of them reached this level of personal well-being and respectability, but those who were happy enough to reach it, were considered to have been blessed with 'fulness of life' by Waqa, to be nearer to him, to enjoy his good grace, and as such to be the leaders designate at all rituals which exceded the competence of a father of a family.

Besides an intricate division into clans and lineages, Matcha society was also characterized by four social strata: *borana, gabaro,* despised castes of artisans (blacksmiths, potters, tanners, weavers) and slaves. The first of these strata, the *borana,* 'the eldest sons', prided themselves of being of pure Oromo descent, and it was strongly believed by the people that all blessing came to them from *Waqa* through these *borana.*

Since each of the five *gada* sets had its members in all lineages and in all social strata (except for the slaves) the *gada* system provided a basis for overall unity between the various descent groups and social strata. In addition, it also provided the organization for recruiting men for war in cases of conflict with outsiders or between members of the same *gada* confederation.[3]

2. Earlier peoples

When the first Matcha pioneers arrived in the country, they found several other peoples already there: Mao, Gumnao, Watta in the highlands and Gumuz, Sheti, Koma, Anuak in the lowlands.

The Mao are the most important group. They occupied nearly all the highlands – the highlands which were the Matcha's chief interest. The southern Mao formed one society with a class of royal overlords, called Busasi. These Busasi and most probably part of the southern Mao were immigrants from the Ethiopian kingdom of Kaffa.[4] The northern Mao were probably incorrectly named; it is fairly certain they are the same people referred to as 'Amman' in earlier records.[5]

What is certain of both groups is that they fought the Matcha fiercely, and inflicted repeatedly defeats on them. Because of their numbers, however, the new settlers were bound to prevail eventually. While

[3] Cf. John Hinnant, 1978 and Hector Blackhurst, 1978.

[4] Cf. V.L. Grottanelli, 1940 and Wendy James, 1980.

[5] A Triulzi, 1980:21 (I).

taking their land from these people, the Matcha took slaves from among them and married Mao women.

We may well presume that the Matcha also exercised their custom of killing men for honour against the first inhabitants of their new country. In general, however, Matcha killing raids seem to have been directed more against the lowlands people, while more friendly relations were established with the Mao.

The southern Mao and their overlords the Busasi soon learned to consider the Matcha as a superior people, stronger than they themselves. Although local traditions are rather scarce, one gets the impression (confirmed from more recent happenings) that at least some of the Mao were scarcely reluctant to becoming slaves of the Matcha. There were positive prospects for them in the change. A Mao girl who became a Matcha's wife was sure that her children would become free people in the long run, an ambition not possible under the Busasi. Married Mao slaves had a chance to be set free at some time and inserted into a Matcha clan. The Busasi for their part began to marry Matcha girls and to adopt Matcha names in addition to their own.

3. Petty despots

From about 1830 onwards we witness the rise in western Matcha-land of petty despots who, on the base of landed property, little armies of their own (including slaves) and by control of the trade routes, gradually succeeded in dominating more extensive areas.[6] A century ago, the three most important petty rulers of this kind were Jote Tullu (Ghidami), Abba Dhasa (Galaan) and Borrayu in the country called after him.

Independently of the *gada* rulers they pursued their own aims to increase their area of influence, the number of people who worked for them, and their income from trade. Their activities resulted into repeated clashes between rivals.

They set up an administration of justice of their own, imprisoning their adversaries and even putting them to death. They did not directly oppose the gada system, at times even supporting it, but in general weakening its influence. It survived mainly thanks to its religious features.

[6] Cf. H.S. Lewis, 1965, 1970 (I).

4. The Amharic conquest

In the eighties of the last century, the Ethiopian emperor Menelik II started his campaign against the still independent eastern and western Oromo. His major general in these campaigns was Gobana, himself a Tulama Oromo. After the local Matcha ruler of Neqemte, 'king' Moroda had submitted to him on condition that he should remain an autonomous ruler under the direct overlordship of the emperor to whom he would pay yearly tributes in the name of his people, Gobana pushed on westwards.

It must have been around this time that Borrayu, after he had defeated his neighbour abba Dasa, called in the aid of Tessama, the Amharic governor of Gore, against his other rival, Jote. Gobana and Tessama were only too eager to play off the rivals one against each the other. In two years both Jote and Borrayu had become vassals of the Ethiopian emperor under the same conditions as their colleague of Neqemte. Gobana entrusted them in the emperor's name with the subjection of the still more or less independent Matcha clans and of the earlier peoples in the west and provided them with arms to this purpose. The yearly tax they had to pay consisted mainly in gold, ivory and slaves. They were also to do their best to convert their people to Christianity. Their conversion was seen by Menelik as an important means of integrating them into his Christian empire. So his new vassals built a few churches and a limited number of their subjects and relatives together with them were baptized, but for the most this task was overshadowed by other assignments and by their personal ambitions.

The old Matcha practice of taking slaves as they needed and of killing men for the sake of honour and (as they saw it) of procreation, grew from now on together with an international slave trade led by Arabs and other foreigners, who recruited local Matcha to help them.

In their turn, these expeditions were combined with or made under the cover of campaigns for the subjection of the earlier peoples and also went often together with the collection of elephant tusks.

It is true that Menelik, under pressure from his European allies, had abolished slavery in his country, but his promises were for the greater part a dead letter. Apart from the determined resistance against this abolition on the part of his subjects, the emperor needed slaves himself to maintain good relations with the Arabs who, for centuries, had supplied the Middle East and even India with Ethiopian slaves.[7]

[7] Cf. R. Pankhurst, 1961:372–388.

Jote's efforts to subdue the Busasi failed, and Jote swore vengeance. But the Busasi king appealed to Menelik and ended by being himself appointed an autonomous vassal on equal terms with Jote. Apart from their services to the emperor both Jote and Borrayu served their own interests as well. To strengthen their hold of the country they had themselves helped by their relatives who were appointed landlords and supervisors of whole areas.

In the beginning of this century, Jote was summoned to Addis Ababa, because of the harsh treatment he had meted out to his subjects. He remained in prison until after Menelik's death (1913). Borrayu's influence weakened with age. Their descendants did not succeed in keeping the Amhara's confidence, and in 1918 the latter put an end to their indirect rule over western Matchaland and appointed the first Amharic governor in Dembidollo.[8]

5. Economy

Profiting from the peace the Amhara had imposed on the warring Matcha clans Greek traders from Gambela were quick to settle in Sayoland. They encouraged the cultivation of coffee, and the Matcha farmers willingly responded to this new opportunity, since epidemic among their cattle had already prepared them for a shift towards agriculture. Thanks to these Greeks trade remained mainly directed towards the Sudan via the White Nile basin, aside from the trade in ivory, gold and slaves, which was directed eastwards.

The Greeks also introduced saw-mills and grain-mills and founded local industries (soap, perfume). In addition, most of them married Oromo girls. In this way they made themselves an integral part of the area's development.

6. The Amharic rule

From the beginning direct Amharic rule was imposed on Jote's and Borrayu's territories harshly and forcefully.

a) The *gada* system which was already superseded by the indirect rule, was almost entirely reduced to a ritual institution only. A number of lawsuits were reserved to the government court, and for others people increasingly had recourse to the same court, thus bypassing their own appointed *gada* judges.

[8] In regard to the people's oral traditions about their petty 'kings', see my article, 1970: 141–148.

b) A number of Ethiopian priests, mostly from Gojam, were invited to the country. Pressure was exerted on the people to build churches, to have themselves baptized and to bury their dead on the Christian cemetries. Land was taken from them and given to the Church and, in addition, people were forced to pay yearly taxes on behalf of the priests. About 1925 most Matcha of the Dembidollo area had been Christianized, often at a mass baptism. The pagan element only remained represented by older people, by a few borana who stubbornly refused to have themselves baptized, and by the rise of new institution of so called *qallu*, ritual experts, who built up large followings, also among the newly baptized Matcha.[9]

c) Under direct Amharic rule approximately two thirds of the land was taken by the state; one third was left to the local population. Of the first two thirds, extensive stretches of land were given to the Church, to ex-soldiers, and Amharic dignitaries. Others passed into the hands of Greek immigrants. Large portions of good land went to the imperial family. A certain number of local households were appointed to work for Amharic officials. The rest of the land was entrusted to local landowners whose rights became hereditary.

Traditionally to the Matcha all land had been clan land; now all of them became tenants of a landlord for whom they had to work and via whom they paid taxes to the emperor.

It is true that part of the landlords were members of the local clans, and not all of them turned out to be exploiters in the true sense of that word, and that people continued to speak of 'clan land' and to make efforts to keep it within their clan, but all of their landlords could freely sell portions of the land at any time to non-Oromo, to Matcha of other clans, or to people who, according to Matcha tradition had no right to possess any land at all, such as the members of the despised castes.

All these Amharic governmental policies were clearly aimed at a gradual de-Oromonization of the country.

7. Missions

During this period, a further new element made its entry into the area. Alarmed by disease among the people, the Amharic governor, Biru, urgently invited the American Presbyterian missionaries from

[9] K.E. Knutsson published a study of these *qallu* in eastern Matchaland, 1967.

nearby Sudan to open an hospital in Dembidollo. They came, gave the medical help requested, and very soon started other missionary work, including a school, where they taught people to read the bible (1919).

A year after their coming, Catholic Italian missionaries (Consolata Fathers) began to build a saw-mill in Sakko, some 12 kms to the west of Dembidollo. They fostered agriculture in many ways, commenced a school, and bought off slaves settling them on their lands as free people.

The establishment of missionary schools marked the beginning of a relatively high literacy level in the Dembidollo area.

8. The Italian occupation, 1935–1940

The American missionaries were forced to leave, but they left some well-trained Matcha pastors who not only secured the survival of their mission but consolidated and extended it.

Conversion to Catholic Christianity was not encouraged by the new colonial rulers. Instead they were more inclined, in pursuance of their anti-Amhara policies, to encourage Islam and a revival of traditional Matcha culture.

Since a new gada period of eight years was due to begin, they encouraged the people to pursue their traditional customs in this matter and, accordingly, a new ritual leader was chosen. The protestant pastors, however, protested against this revival of 'pagan' practices, and the Italians yielded to their protest. The gada traditions were already too weak to overcome the opposition, and it proved to be the last time that new gada leaders were in fact elected in the area.

A lasting result of the Italian occupation was that slavery was effectively abolished. For the rest, this was not met with enthusiasm from all slaves involved. Some were reluctant to change a situation that seemed not only bearable but beneficial or, at least, acceptable.

9. The second ruling period of Haile Sellassie I, 1941–1974

Direct Amharic rule was re-established at this time, but without some of the harsher elements of the period prior to the Italian occupation. Haile Sellassie encouraged the establishment of more schools in pursuance of his policies of Amharic domination, since he needed a limited number of Amharized Oromo to help him to administer the Oromo territories.

For some time more, almost all schools were both administered and financed by the missions.

As protector of the Ethiopian Church, he only admitted missionaries into his country under the title of 'teachers' and in limited numbers only. The Presbyterian mission started a secondary school providing promising youths with scholarships abroad. They enlarged their hospital, staffed by American doctors, and extended health-care into the country-areas. Catholic missionaries, too, made soon an important contribution in these fields.

We also should mention here the Adventists, who commenced their missionwork in the area during this period.

10. Some aspects of the situation in 1974

The religious affiliation of the country included in a radius of 20 kms around Dembidollo was in 1974 approximately as follows. Total population 80.000. Christians of the Ethiopian Church 57.000, Protestants 14.000, Catholics 5.000, Muslims 4.000.

At present there are two secondary schools in Dembidollo (10.000 habitants).

In the economic field, the shift towards agriculture and in particular to coffee cultivation continued, as did the gradual shift in trade from Sudan towards Addis Ababa. The total absence of all-weather roads to Gambela and Ghimbi remained a serious handicap. Airflights between Dembidollo and Addis Ababa, several times weekly, did much to break down the isolation of western Matchaland.

The revolution of 1974 brought other important changes in all fields of life, but these changes fall outside the scope of this book.

11. Previous research in the area

Previous scientific research bearing on the subject matter of this book is rather scarce.

In 1928 the great Italian scholar Ernesto Cerulli paid a visit to his compatriotes, the missionaries of Sakko. In 1933 he published some of his memories in Vol. II of his book *Ethiopia Occidentale.*

Vinigi Grottanelli made an extremely valuable research among the southern Mao. He published the results in *I Mao,* 1940.

An Ethiopian historian Terrefe Woldetsadik published in 1968 an article *The Unification of Ethiopia (1880–1935), Wallaga,* in which also an account is given of the Dembidollo area.

In another article, written together with Donald Crummey, *The Introduction and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity in Qelem Awraja, Western Wollega, from about 1886 to 1941,* the Dembidollo born his-

torian Negaso Gidada published some data about this aspect of local history.

The Italian historian Alessandro Triulzi made his research in western Wollega during the years 1972–73 and also spent some time in Dembidollo. He published *The Gudru Oromo and Their Neighbours in the Two Generations before the Battle of Embabo,* (1975), *The Background to Ras Gobana's Expeditions to Western Wallaga in 1886–1888,* (1975), and *Funj Rule over the Southern Ethiopian Marches in the Early Eighteenth Century,* (1980) and *Social Protest and Rebellion in some Gäbbar songs from Qélläm, Wälläga* (1980). His major publication is *Salt, Gold and Legitimacy – Prelude to the History of a no man's land Bela Shangul, Wallaga, Ethiopia* (ca. 1800–1898) which appeared in 1981. The book also gives precious data, up to now unpublished, about the history of the Western Matcha.

In 1979 Jan Hultin published an article bearing on the Sibu Matcha *Political Structure and Development of Inequality among the Matcha Oromo.*

In 1974–75, Wendy James, university of Oxford, carried out her research in western Wollega. She also visited the area around Dembidollo. Like V. Grottanelli, however, she was first and foremost interested in the earlier peoples. In 1980 an interesting paper of hers appeared *From Aboriginal to Frontier Society in Western Ethiopia.* It represents a substantial new supply of data about the Mao and their relations with the Matcha.

Finally I would like to mention here also the biography of Keis Gidada Solon who was the leading Matcha pastor of the Presbyterian Mission, *The Other Side of Darkness,* by Ruth McCreery and Martha M. Vandevort, which contains valuable historical data about the area (1972).

Chapter 4

WHAT IS IN A TITLE?

"Myths, rites and symbols" – what do we understand by these words? They are used in various senses. So it seems appropriate to explain from the beginning what we understand by them in this book; especially as it was written first of all for the Oromo themselves. In the beginning my Oromo assistants were obviously confused about the meaning of these English words.

1. Myths

For a long time already, indeed for many centuries, the usual meaning of the word 'myth' is 'fable', 'invention', 'fiction', something that is not real, not true. However, during the past 60 years, western scholars have re-introduced its original meaning, the meaning it still has in societies of a more archaic type than the modern ones. Here 'myth' means a 'true story' and beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession of the people because it is sacred, exemplary and significant.[10] It is in this sense we understand 'myth' in this book.

Myths deal with the origins of man and his world. A number deal with the creation of the world. Others speak of the origin of human institutions such as the ones by which a people is ruled, f. i. kings or a ruling group chosen from their midst. Others try to explain the mystery of death, sin and suffering, man's quest for happiness and his failure in finding it. Many of them, too, are concerned with man's relations to the animal and vegetable world in general or to certain animals and plants in particular. In the latter case they may tell how man received his cattle or how a certain plant became his staple food.

With the aid of oral tradition the new generations are informed about the most important things of their world – things which, however, remain loaded with mystery and which can only be apprehended obscurely and through intuition.

Myths not only deal with things which came about in what is often called 'the beginning of time'; they also deal with things which came into existence during the course of a people's history. Hence the word 'origin' has to be taken to point to an interference by the Superhuman in general. There are peoples, indeed, who have no creation myths;

[10] Cf. Mircea Eliade, 1963:1.

nevertheless they do have various myths about the origins of several of their institutions. The Oromo are an example of this.

This is not the place to digress about the various kinds of myths. In a number of them certain superhuman beings or the Supreme Being are explicitly mentioned, in others not. Many myths are clearly concerned with representing things as they were when they came out of God's hands, unobscured and unspoiled by human greed, pride and passion. This does not mean that myths are only speaking of the past. On the contrary, they are first of all concerned with the people's present situation. When a situation (f. i. an institution) changes in the course of time, the myth supporting it changes as well.

Since they deal with realities which go beyond logical discourse and scientific ways of thought, the events in a myth are commonly expressed in a symbolic way, which means that they are expressed by symbols, i. e. things, acts and gestures which are not the realities themselves but rather reflections of them.

These realities are presented in events and the form of a story. In this way they are most likely to be remembered.

To quote an excellent text about myths: "Myth ... is an essential part of the patterns of human thought and discourse which can never be entirely replaced by logical discourse, particularly in these questions for which logical discourse fails to render an answer which satisfies the mind. The newer view of myth is summed up by Miller Burrows as ... 'a symbolic, approximate expression of truth which the human mind cannot adequately and accurately express' ... Myth implies not falsehood, but truth; not primitive, naive misunderstanding, but an insight more profound than scientific description and logical analysis can ever achieve. The language of myth in this sense is consciously inadequate, being simply the nearest we can come to a formulation of what we see very darkly."

The best known myths in this sense are the venerable stories of the first book of the bible. "What distinguishes these passages of the Old Testament from ancient myths is not the patterns of thought and language, which seem in every respect to be the same, but the Hebrew idea of God as known through His revelation of Himself ... What they knew of God could only be expressed through symbolic form ... and the relations of God with the world and with man were perceived and expressed through the same patterns and processes which elsewhere we call mythical. This is the quality of thought and language by whatever term it may be designated."

Most of what has been said here about myth in general, is taken from John L.M. McKenzie's *Dictionary of the Bible*, 1976.

Myths deal with origins – origins which, real though they may be, elude human understanding. When the belief in the actual origins

wanes, myths lose their quality of sacred stories, conveying things more true and more real than those conveyed by historical records. Then they are reduced to mere fiction.

For all that it is related in terms of the past, myth is not history. Although it often *seems* to tell us historical facts, we can never be wholly certain of this without confirmation from other sources. These other sources may be provided by scientific research, but also by the people themselves. Indeed, their mythical way of thought does not deprive them of their sense of history. It is only one of the patterns of human thought, also for them, and they are well aware of it. Apart from the superhuman backgrounds of their way of life, they remain well aware of the merely human factors which played a part in their history as a people. I myself have obtained exact historical records from people who also told me myths.

When I asked them to tell me a myth, they often seemed somewhat reluctant. As my Oromo assistant made clear to me:

> "They think that we as educated people will laugh at them for continuing to believe in such stories. They are also aware that it did not actually happen." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

Once, however, they commenced their story, they were soon carried away on the atmosphere of mythical thought, and their whole attitude gave the impression that they felt themselves to be telling a true story.

The Matcha themselves distinguish between:

a) *Oddu,* 'stories for children' as they say, but which normally include moral teachings, such as the stories about the man-eating giant with four eyes, Bulgu, and beast-fables.

b) *Oddu dhugati,* 'true stories' in the sense of historical stories, 'stories which really happened'. An example of this are the clan-stories of Chapter 9, 4.

c) Stories for which they seem to have no special name, but which are true in another sense. My assistant Gammachu Magarsa described them as follows:

> "These are stories which are not only of the past but also of the present and future; they explain our present situation in the light of Waqa as the ultimate cause of all things, such as the story of our law-giver Makko Billi when our people crossed the Ghibe river. (Chapter 8, 1) I think these are the stories you call 'myths'. We have no special name for them, but they, too, are

considered as true stories, even more real than the oddu dhugati. They are not based on things man did but on what Waqa has done and is still doing. If I myself would have to find a name for them, I think I would call them *'dubbi Waqa* – words, deeds, things of Waqa'.

Waqa's deeds are of all time. He still continues giving all animals their share (he refers to the myth in Chapter 27, 4). He continues creating us from his water every day. We cross the Ghibe river from generation to generation. When a grandfather sees his newly born grandson for the first time (his grandson in whom he sees himself), he feels he has crossed the Ghibe river once more."

2. Symbols

Peoples everywhere express themselves in symbols. In literate societies speech and writing dominate. In pre-literate societies such as the Oromo's, other symbols are more important; they act their ideas, beliefs and values rather than formulating them. But what is a symbol?

The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary defines a symbol as follows: "A sign, mark, object etc. looked upon as representing something." In this sense, white is a symbol of purity, a cross is a symbol of Christianity.

However, to grasp the full meaning of the word, we do well not to look at a symbol as merely a sign of something else. In many cases they are much more. In these cases they not only indicate something else, but they also impart what they indicate. Water, for instance, is a symbol of life and purification, but it also purifies and gives life. This fuller meaning of a symbol holds good especially for the so called 'ritual symbols' – symbols used in rituals where superhuman beings are invoked.

> "It must not been forgotten that ritual symbols are not merely signs representing known things; they are felt to possess ritual efficacy, to be charged with power from unknown sources and to be capable of acting on persons and groups coming into contact with them in such a way as to change them for the better or in a desired direction." (V. Turner, 1967:54)

We have only to think of immersion in holy water or the mere sprinkling of it. In this sense good manners, too, are loaded with symbolism.

Within the frame of their culture all peoples have symbols of their own. Just as each people has its own unique language, so their unique symbolism can only be understood when their mode of life and thought is also understood.

As with many other peoples Oromo understand all beings to be charged with some specific power of their own by which they influence one another for better or worse. They feel themselves to be living, so to say, in a magnetic field. This makes it natural for nearly everything to be used as a symbol.

In regard to the Oromo there is even more. In their view every plant, every animal has its special qualities from God's creative power which is at work in it continually. This way it is not a man-made symbol but given to them by God.

The difference between 'sign' and 'symbol' is rendered in Oromo by the words *'agarsiftu'* (from the verb *'agarsisu* – to show, to point at) and *'mallatto'*.

> "An agarsiftu points to something that is not in the agarsiftu itself; it points to something the way a direction-post does. A mallatto, however, has in itself what it signifies. In this sense we say: *'Tchokorsa mallatto jirenyati* – tchokorsa grass is a symbol of life.'
> The ayana of tchokorsa (God's specific creative power in this grass; Chapter 12) is in the tchokorsa grass itself; it is an ayana of life. We use tchokorsa in many rituals and, while doing so, we also believe that it makes us participate in its life."
>
> (Gammachu Magarsa)

[Nowadays, the Oromo often use the word *'milikita'* from the Amharic *'milikit'* which covers both meanings, 'sign' and 'symbol'.]

3. Rites

In English daily speech no clear distinction is made between the words 'ritual', 'rite', 'ceremony' and 'ceremonial'. For clarity's sake therefore, some anthropologists who study the peoples' cultures, have felt compelled to distinguish between 'rite' and 'ritual' on one hand and 'ceremony' and 'ceremonial' on the other.

By 'ceremony' and 'ceremonial' they then understand activities which have no direct bearing on people's religion. They express merely

human relationships, an attitude from man to man; they are in the broadest sense forms of social intercourse.

By 'rite' and 'ritual' they understand activities with a definite religious element, actions by which some mystical, superhuman power is invoked.

In this book I will stick to this distinction as far as possible. "As far as possible", because in practice the distinction is not always clear, since the invocation of some mystical, superhuman power does not need to be explicit.

Once this distinction is made, however, we can say that a ritual may become a mere ceremony much as a myth may become a mere fairy tale.

> "We Oromo have no word that covers all things you call 'rituals'. Our word *'tchida'* is used for all kinds of positive, joyful rituals. Thus we speak of *'tchida daumsa* – birth-rituals', *'tchida sa'a dabbachu* – the ritual of thanksgiving for the birth of a calf', *'tchida herumna* – wedding-ritual', *'tchida Atete* – the ritual of Atete' a.s.o.
> However, for what you call 'a ritual of peacemaking' or 'a ritual of purification' we use the words *'gumi'* or *'yai'* which simply mean 'a meeting'. The ceremonies of the transfer of power by one gada set to another and the proclamation of the law on the mountain of the Mao were also gumi or were simply called by their own name." (Gammachu Magarsa)

Ideal and reality

Rites express and support moral standards of behaviour which in everyday life often fail to materialize. Anyone approaching a people's way of life mainly through their rituals and ceremonies alone is bound to be confronted with their ideals rather than their daily practice. On the other hand, a onesided view of this daily practice with all its display of pride, jealousy, discrimination, greed and lack of moral strength does not do justice to a people either. No more than with individuals a people's actions in everyday life wholly reflect what they really are. Their very rituals and ceremonials can be seen as a perpetual struggle on their part to uphold these ideals in spite of their inability to live up to them in everyday life.

Efficacy of the ritual

Efficacy is the first, indeed almost the only norm for any ritual. While performing it, the actors' first concern is to do everything properly. It is this practical attitude which dominates the whole performance. One could compare it with the building of a house. Things are discussed throughout the process of building. The technical expert is consulted again and again. The same holds good for the ritual expert whose assistance is mostly called in. He is consulted in every detail and tells the performers over and over again what they have to say or to do.

The symbols, charged with power as they are, should not be handled sparingly. Where cleansing is involved there should be much water. A single small blade of *tchokorsa* grass (a symbol of peace) in one's hand is not enough. The wet grass, strewn in the house (a symbol of fertility and life) should be plenty. The symbols must work.

> "As I slaughtered my *butta* bull in front of [the open door of] my house, his blood splashed the partition of the backroom [passing through the frontroom]. It was very good. In that house I begot two sons." (Shagerdi Bukko, informant)

Any person liable to endanger the ritual's efficacy is excluded: menstruating women, those who had sexual intercourse the night before, a man with blood on his hands (i. e. one who has killed someone but has not undertaken a purification ritual) and, most important, anyone who is not at peace with others.

The ritual should be performed on a propitious day, since days, too, have some divine element in them which can be favourable to a ritual or not. Even the hour of the day plays its part. A boy should bring home his bride in the morning while the day is still young.

A lot of public rituals are performed when the sky is cloudy, since in a cloudy sky Waqa (God/sky) is felt to be nearer to man.

When Matcha say that they perform a ritual in such and such a way "because it is custom", such a remark may be only an easy answer but it also implies that their way of performing the ritual has proved to be effective over many generations. It is the efficacy of a custom that accounts for its authority.

'Praying well' in their eyes is first of all to pray effectively. Feelings of piety scarcely play a part. It is in this sense that Waquma Tollera, one of my best informants, once told me, while pointing to certain ritual symbols:

"We do not pray to these things themselves; we pray to God. But these things help us to pray."

Flexibility and variety

When a ritual cannot be postponed and the precise things needed are not available, people will try to make the best of what is at hand in the circumstances. For instance, a sheep is needed at a wedding-party. It has to be slaughtered by the groom as a symbol of his bride who is about to shed her maidenblood for the sake of motherhood. If there is no sheep available, for instance as a result of sheep disease in the country, they will make a sheep from *tchaffe,* a kind of thick grass that grows on marshy places. While killing this mock-sheep, the groom says: "Now I am going to kill the wedding-sheep ... Now its blood is shed." a.s.o.

It goes without saying that the symbols are not universal; trees and plants differ in different parts of the country.

Other variations are due rather to a shift in emphasis. In western Matchaland the bride is forbidden to see the blood of the sheep, slaughtered on her wedding-day, since it is seen as her blood. In eastern Matchaland (Tchaliya) she must stand near her groom, while the latter slaughters, symbolizing her willingness to shed her maidenblood for the sake of motherhood. While the sheep is slaughtered, she is standing at his left. As soon as this is finished, she moves over to his right, the ritual place of the housewife.

Still other variations originate in the traditions of a single clan. Most variations, however, remain within the limits of general Oromo culture, and any Oromo, wherever from, can understand their symbolism.

Remark

Culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of his society." (Edward Tylor)

"The life history of any individual person is first and foremost an accomodation to the pattern of thought, the concepts, customs and standards of behaviour handed down in his community. From the moment of his birth, these customs of his people shape his experience and behaviour. By the time he can talk, he is the little creature of his culture, and by the time he has grown and able to take part in his people's activities, their habits have become his habits, their beliefs his beliefs, their impossiblities his impossibilities. Every other child that is born into his peo-

ple will share these customs with him. No child born into a people on the other side of the globe can ever achieve the thousandth part."[11]

Culture is "the sum of learned knowledge and skills – including religion and language – that distinguishes one community from another, and which, subject to the vagaries of innovation and change, passes on in a recognizable form from generation to generation."[12]

These quotations include all the important features of what is understood by 'culture' in a book like this, rather than the accepted use of this word in everyday speech.

One of the most important features of culture is that it only involves things which are transmitted from generation to generation by the processes of learning. Things which are not to be learned from others like crying, swallowing, walking are not part of culture, but a certain way of crying, a certain manner of walking, imposed by the people's rules of behaviour, do form part of their culture.

[11] Ruth Benedict, 1934:18. For the sake of a better understanding I have changed or added some words.

[12] I.M. Lewis, 1976:17.

Chapter 5

THE AUTHOR AND HIS BOOK

1. Field and period of research

My research was carried out mainly in the area west of the little town of Dembidollo in the extreme south-west of Oromoland.

It is the area where Oromo migrations towards the west came to a standstill with their occupation of the last spurs of the Ethiopian highlands. Behind Anfilo, indeed, the country rapidly descends to the lowlands of the Baro rivier and the Sudan, areas that are not attractive to the Oromo.

Part of my research (1968–80) took place during the first years of a new era in the country's history, those years following the revolution which put an abrupt end to the methods of landholding and the highly centralized government of the last emperor. The socio-political changes brought about by this revolution will no be dealt with in this book, important though they are.

My research was not carried out continually for twelve years. It was interrupted several times by a stay in my native country, The Netherlands, or by periods in other parts of Oromo territory.

To be able to return, again and again, to the same field of research is certainly a rare privilege for any anthropologist. I owe this opportunity on one hand to several organizations in my homeland who financed my research and, on the other, to the help and hospitality given to me in many ways by the Catholic missionaries in the area. The latter was mainly due to my being a priest of their religious congregation, the Vincentian Fathers.

2. Priest and anthropologist

My very status of a priest-anthropologist, however, was certainly not without some drawbacks of its own.

The people's expectations of a priest did not allow him to manifest an interest in their pre-Christian way of life; much less to regard this with any respect. Though several of the missionaries were well versed in the Oromo language, and all of them enjoyed the trust and sympathy of the people, the latter did not regard their priests as being much acquainted with the values and customs of their daily life as passed down to them from their ancestors.

In theory, these foreign missionaries were quite prepared to appreciate much of their people's cultural inheritance. Several of them were certainly not wholly unacquainted with problems of culture-clash or social organization. Within the rather limited range of their daily contacts with their people, all of them were frequently confronted with the need to know more about Oromo ways of life and thought. But the immediate claims of their work, the need to keep things going in the pastoral field, their schools, health-clinics, and specialized development projects, made great demands on their time and energy, leaving barely any scope for enquiries into the cultural backgrounds of their people.

So, when they invited me to stay with them, it was on the clear understanding that I would keep myself almost exclusively free for just this kind of research.

Supported by my priest colleagues I was fortunate to share, from the very beginning, in the trust and sympathy they enjoyed with the people. They also saved me the trouble of looking for a good assistant and interpreter.

Nevertheless, as could well be expected, I soon experienced that my working program was not very likely to meet with full cooperation from the people. In their eyes, a priest should not be concerned with their pre-Christian customs, moral norms and all kind of situations in the sensitive field of marriage and descent. As a priest I had only to preach the word of God, to ensure God's blessing on their family, animals and crops, and to promote that mutual peace between them which latter, in their eyes, is a prerequisite for these blessings from God. Accordingly, I was quickly enough informed that I was spoken of, sometimes, as a priest less good than they had hoped for. In addition, since, in their eyes, I was 'a brother' of their parish priests, they were understandably afraid that I would communicate to their spiritual fathers things they prefered they should remain ignorant of. They were afraid of ontoward reactions on those priests' part.

As a result, it took me longer to be informed about several aspects of their everyday life than would have been the case if I had not been 'a brother of their fathers'.

Every research-worker has attitudes and values of his own which influence his view of things and account for both his achievements and his limitations. My own personal approach was inspired and guided by my conviction that God is at work in all religions. According to this view every religion is a holy ground where one has to take off his

sandals, as Moses was ordered to do in front of the burning bush. Apart from its eloquent expression of awe in God's presence, this scene from the Old Testament soon acquired an additional meaning for me. The more my research proceeded, the more I felt myself to be confronted with a merely human mystery as well – a mystery comparable to that of the burning bush that remained unconsumed. Like other peoples the Oromo have a view of things which cannot be entirely comprehended by our western mind. Especially is this true in regard to their experience of the superhuman. They mirror the divine in their own way – a way that eludes our western categories of thought. They do not challenge certain contradictions our western mind finds difficult to accept (for example, divinity is one and many at the same time). So, to the mystery of God another was added: the human mystery of a specific experience of the divine. Accordingly, I found myself increasingly in the position of that fine missionary in Zaire, father Placide Tempels who, after ten years of talking to the Bantu, finally decided to sit down with them and to ask them to talk first to him: "Please, tell me what God has told to you and I will tell you what he told to us."

3. Some more characteristic features of this book

Not only in the field of religion but also in other aspects this attitude of listening to what the Oromo themselves have to say will show up in this book. Throughout I will allow the people to speak for themselves.

From a purely scientific point of view, this method has several advantages. First, it makes the texts on which my conclusions are based available to anyone. Secondly, it leaves room for other interpretations on the base of further research. Thirdly, it leaves room for the Matcha's own understanding of them.

Another reason for this method is a desire to make the book readable to both the Oromo themselves and others who are not experts in social anthropology and for whom sustained scholarly language would be a disadvantage, and a discouragement to reading.

In general, I will allow the people to speak first and only then add my comment. This comment will itself often include some further information from the people. It will be further elucidated by the findings of other scholars who have studied the Oromo in other areas, by other methods, and from different points of view.

Both in regard to the area of research undertaken and its content

this book covers a field of which, until now, very little has been published.

The area could rightly be called 'the Far West' of Oromo territory. On their way westwards the pioneers of the Matcha tribe evidently lost something of their ancient cultural heritage. They mixed increasingly with other peoples whose land they took, and were influenced by them in various ways. Several traditional institutions of their own could not be maintained in their new surroundings. They fell out of use or were replaced by more adaptive ones. One factor in favour of their traditional way of life, however, was that, living so far away into the west, they remained for a long time outside the reach of Muslim influence and of the territorial ambitions of the Christian emperors in the east.

In regard to the subject matter dealt with in this book (the people's myths, rites and symbols), it has not hitherto constituted the main topic of any work.

The study approximating most nearly to mine, both in regard to the area and its topics, is that of Karl Eric Knutsson, dealing with the modern ritual experts (called *'qallu'*) in eastern Matchaland who arose chiefly in reaction against the influence of Christianity. I have not included their colleagues in western Matchaland in my research which deals rather with the concepts, rituals and customs of the common people all of which existed long before the emergence of these modern *qallu*.[13] In addition, it must be said that the ritual practices of these comparatively recent experts (they adopted Christian elements) are certainly not in all respects a true reflection of the people's traditional religion.

A number of rituals and institutions touched on in this book are no longer in use or are on the way to disappear altogether. The underlying values and concepts, however, are for the greater part still alive and have found new expressions in current living. Fighting for example, has constituted an important value in Oromo life for centuries; nowadays, it finds expression in their eagerness to possess a gun and (at least with a number of them) to enrol themselves as soldiers.

[13] *Qallu:* the usual orthography is *'kallu'*.

Where they have not yet found new expressions, they are still hidden under the surface. We could compare present Matcha culture with an iceberg whose greater part is under the water. The under-water-part still influences and controls the direction taken by the visible part. Its extent is not only at depth but is more widespread and may be dangerous, even hurtful to anyone who only regards the visible part.

Note 1

As a general rule I give the texts in Oromo when the actual words are to a great extent fixed, as in proverbs, ritual formulae and songs. In several instances the original tapes have been lost in the exigencies of field research or of the revolution.

Sometimes, I also add the Oromo text where English fails to convey the meaning of the Oromo words accurately.

Note 2

Phonetic transcription

Being not a linguist I have refrained from a too much sophisticated phonetic transcription.

ch	is cacuminal (Englisch 'church').
tch	is the same but emphatic and lightly detached from the sound that follows.
dh	is cacuminal and equally lightly detached from the sound that follows.
j	is prepalatal (English 'jar').
k	is normal, mediopalatal.
q	is postpalatal.
th	is precacuminal and lightly detached from the sound that follows.
y	is as in the English 'yet'.
a	is always as in the English 'ask' though it can be shorter or longer.
e	is as in the English 'great' though it can be shorter or longer.
i	is as in the English 'meat' though it can be shorter or longer.
o	is as in the English 'oath' though it can be shorter or longer.
u	is as in the English 'full' though it can be shorter or longer.

Chapter 6

ASSISTANTS AND INFORMANTS

1. Assistants

Mirresa Gamtesa

When I arrived in my field of research, my first experience was the help local missionaries can afford to an anthropologist by providing him with a good assistant from among the people.

The Dutch missionary Jack van Helden – 'abba Yaiqob' to his people – who had already been working there for ten years, brought me into contact with one of his teachers at the mission-station of Addo. His name was Mirresa Gamtesa. Mirresa, at that time, was a young man in his twenties, married and father of two daughters. Like most teachers in the countryside he was, at the same time, a farmer. Here is a conversation with him which I noted down after six months of close cooperation.

> *Mirresa:* When abba Yaiqob asked me to help you, I had no idea what you wanted from me. You were a priest, and I did not expect you to be interested in the old ways of our people. I myself, too, did not know much about them, since I had been learning very different things in school, and also because, during holidays, I was most of the time with abba Yaiqob. We worked together and were eating together. He said me whatever he liked and I imitated him. If I had lived with my people, I never would have dared to do this.
>
> It was you who taught me a new way.
>
> Before you came here, I did not know much, for all that I was a teacher. Knowing only a little is not good. You could compare me with a medical assistant with basic nurse training who has learned only a little about medical treatment. When we saw an old man giving some medical treatment of his own according to what he had learned from his father, we said: "What does he know about these things?"
>
> Now I know better. Now I know that the medicines given by that old man could well be better than the modern ones people get in the hospital. Now I know that we should send that medicine to some laboratory and ask the scientists there to have a closer look at them. We should tell them: "It is useful for such and such a purpose." Then, perhaps, that learned doctor in the

laboratory would say: "It is better than any other medicine." In studying our customs you are doing the same. You helped me to appreciate my own people's knowledge and their way of life. Now I know that there is a 'mystery', a secret meaning, in all that we do. For example, when Oromo wash their hands every morning, before having any food or drink, I know that it has a meaning. Many times when you asked me to enquire about a ritual, I myself hardly knew anything of it, though I had seen it many times. Through you I learned its meaning. Now I know them better than you do.

Author: It is your grandfather in you who makes you understand them better than me.

Mirresa: [smiling] Yes, it is the blood. Our old ways are still in our blood. Now I no longer laugh at those things.

Mirresa had a natural talent for putting himself in the place of his pupils. As he was in the school, so he was with me.

He belonged to a clan called Amumma, but, as with many others, his ancestors were not pure Oromo. His fourth grandfather had been a Mao who had been admitted into the Amumma clan.

Asafa Disasa and Ensermu Waquma

When Mirresa was about to leave the area in order to attend a teachers' training course, he brought me into contact with two friends of his, living in the neighbouring Sakko mission. They took over Mirresa's contacts with some Addo informants and were quick to find others from among their own friends and relatives.

Asafa had the same talent as a teacher as Mirresa. He was a man careful and persistent in tracing the things I wished to know. Another asset was the fact that he had killed a wild buffalo and enjoyed the esteem people have for 'killers'. For this reason, he had some knowledge of hunting-rites himself, and also had easy access to fellow killers who could provide him with more information about these matters. He was married and had two daughters. His father was originally from Galaan country, some twenty kilometers to the north-west of Dembidollo. Forty years before, he had come to Sakko where, at that time, Italian missionaries had a large saw-mill which provided work for hundreds of people. There he lived for years as a faithful mission-worker. His wife came from Alequ. Asafa's parents were *borana,* which means that they belonged to the higher level of their society, the second so-

cial class being the *gabaro*. However, the lustre of *borana*-ship had largely gone, even by that time.

Ensermu was especially valuable to me because he expressed himself easily in English and because he put me in contact with his father, Waquma who, in the course of time, became one of my most precious informants. His mother was a *borana,* his father a *gabaro*.

Both Asafa and Ensermu remained my faithful assistants for eight years.

Beqele Lamu

Ten years younger than Asafa and Ensermu, he was, originally, my assistant in making religious songs. As well he collected for me young people's dancing-songs, hunting- and wedding-songs, and no less than four hundred love-songs.

He is married and father of a son. His family is from Sakko and are *gabaro*.

Gammachu Magarsa

I made his acquaintance in the last year of my research. His grandfather was the last 'holder of the staff' of the *gada* in Dembidollo. Oral tradition in his family is still very rich and he was able to help me a great deal in elucidating the notes and songs I had collected already, adding to them much new information of his own.

He is a *borana,* father of a son and, at the moment, in his early thirties.

2. Informants

Shagerdi Bukko

One day, Mirresa Gamtesa came to me radiant. "I have met an old man," he said. "He was waiting at our clinic. I have spoken with him about many things. He is 'a man who knows'. I have asked him to come to you, some time, and he has agreed."

In this way my relationship with Shagerdi Bukko commenced. It was destined to last for ten years. Shagerdi was, at that time, probably nearly seventy years old. He was an outspoken religious man who had become a Christian after his marriage and, by now, was one of the elders of the nearby Orthodox church. I was soon to learn that, throughout the area, he was considered an expert about his people's past.

Let me introduce him further by one of his own stories.

Once it happened that there had not been rain for a long time. The governor of Dembidollo went to the marketplace and spoke to a man called Gammada. Gammada was a trader. He said to him: "Gammada, there is no rain. People want to plough but the earth is still to hard. If it goes on this way, there will be hunger in the country. So I want all people to pray. Please, do you know a man from the countryside who still knows the old prayers of your people? I want all of them to pray here at the marketplace."

[It is an Oromo view that, on such crucial occasions, as many people as possible should pray together.]

Gammada said to the governor: "Yes, I know such a man. I have seen him in the marketplace." So he called me. But I refused: "There is no government flag," I said. "If there is no flag, people will not gather here."

[It was a custom that all proclamations made by the government were done on market day. It was the best way to make them know throughout the country. To announce such a proclamation the flag was hoisted.]

The next week, the flag was hoisted on market day and people came running from all sides to hear the news. Then they asked me to pray in the old way. But I replied: "Most people here are young, as you can see. They no longer know the old ways of praying." "Pray whatever you like," they said. "But do pray." So I took my place on a high piece of ground and began speaking to the people. "I am going to pray with you for rain," I said. "But what I am going to do is only asking *Waqa* (God/sky), I will not order Him."

Then I started to pray:

"O Waqa, give us rain."

"Give us rain," people said. (He imitates the grumbling of the crowd.)

"Have pity on us. Give us rain."

"Give us rain."

"Give us the good things from the sky. Give us rain."

"Give us rain."

"Give us the good things from the earth. Give us rain."
"Give us rain."
"You are great, we are small. Give us rain."
"Give us rain."
"You are almighty. Give us rain."
"Give us rain."
"You who know all things, give us rain."
"Give us rain."
"Refresh the earth by your rain. Give us rain."
"Give us rain."
"Don't look at our sins. Give us rain."
"Give us rain."
"Don't refuse us what we eat and drink. Give us rain."
"Give us rain."
And so we prayed for a long time. In the end I said:
"O Waqa, if you give us rain within five days, we will say thanks to you."

[Such a promise is often made at the end of a prayer. 'Five days' roughly means 'soon'.]

The women and girls started shouting *"Ililili"* [a shout of approval and joy].
When I prayed it was Monday. On Thursday the rain came. I have prayed in the marketplace two times: once under governor Makonnen and once under governor Tachoma. People called me *'abba boka'* [the man who makes the rain come].

Shagerdi's speciality as an informant were his people's rituals, their social laws and a great variety of prayers. His knowledge was not universal. So, for example, he had never set out hunting big game, nor did he ever seem much interested in this activity, so highly appreciated by most men. I never obtained much information from him on women's rituals. His personal character and life style often reminded me of the old biblical patriarchs as I imagine them to have been.

He was a *gabaro* man of the Abbichu clan – a clan with a rather strong consciousness of their own identity, warlike in former times, and with traditions which frequently differ slightly from those of other dominant clans in the area.

Waquma Tollera

This man was Ensermu's father. His name means *'Waqa* creates', and his father's name, 'Tollera' means 'He (Waqa) has been good' (by giving us this child). He was born in eastern Matcha country, in Tchaliya, some three hundred kms from Dembidollo as the crow flies.

> I was born at the time Lij Yasu came to our country.[14] Lij Yasu recruited soldiers to go with him to the west. My father became one of them. He went with Lij Yasu to Sibu country. There he fell sick. Lij Yasu left him in the care of a man in that country. At that time I was still in my mother's womb. Later I was born. But nobody could give me a name; only my father could do this. When my father came home, he said: "*Waqa* brought me safely home again. My son's name will be Waquma."

Waquma had come to Sakko country seeking to kill a buffalo.[15] With the trophies he would gain a higher social status among his people. He was not the only one of his country to do this. Nor was he the only one who instead of killing his buffalo, found a girl in the area.

He, too, is a deeply religious man who, like Shagerdi, gave me a lot of information about his people's traditional way of life. He grew deeply attached to his new country. "It is a country of blessing," he frequently says.

His concepts and values are the same as those of western Matcha. In regard, however, to the rites and customs he describes, we have to take into account certain divergencies from those of Dembidollo area. These very differences, however, contributed towards giving me a better idea of the backgrounds of local customs and of the varieties one can expect in the rites and symbols of a widely spread society such as the Oromo's.

Other informants

Apart from Asafa Disasa's parents and Ensermu's father, I must mention here Dinsa Sarba of Addo and Ayelle Tura of Sakko. The former was a rather down to earth type of man who was, sometimes, sceptical regarding the old ways of life but nevertheless once told me:

[14] Lij Yasu, grandson of Menelik and his successor who was overthrown in 1917. He came to Matcha country in 1912 or 1913.

[15] Many Oromo until recently travelled to far away areas in order to kill a buffalo.

"The old laws are still in our bones." His lineage had some special traditions of its own, going back to his Hadiya ancestors (a people far south of Addis Ababa) who obviously became incorporated into Matcha society.

Ayelle Tura was from Galaan country, not far from Dembidollo, and has become Ensermu's father-in-law. Both of them are *gabaro*.

I feel sorry that I was unable to give women the share in my information they were entitled to. Oromo men – and my assistants and informants were no exception – like to adopt an attitude of disinterest in what their women are doing and thinking, or they simply say they do not know. Oromo women live in a world of their own in more than one sense, and the separation is maintained by both men and women. The women's world is centered around the hearthfire (the kitchen), the backroom where they give birth, and the little plot of land around the house where they cultivate all kind of plants for the kitchen. Especially in former times, they hardly left their hamlet. A woman is always of another lineage than her husband and retains links with her own kinsfolk. Until recently these links included the participation in certain domestic rituals. Women have rituals and even an important divinity of their own. In all these rituals they are likely to stick more to tradition than their husbands.

However, I did succeed in securing their help in my research to some extent. Asafa's mother and his wife both provided me with valuable information about birth-customs. Ensermu's mother enacted for me several minor rituals, alone or with her husband. Mirresa's mother, too, was of help, as were several other women.

Chapter 7

METHODS OF RESEARCH

To any anthropologist it is an asset if he is able to live and work with the people for some time. My own position as a priest, however, made it impossible to live with them in their houses or in a separate house in a neighbourhood, and to partake in their daily work. There were various reasons for this, some due to the Church and some because of the people themselves.

As previously stated, a number of the rituals and ceremonies I hoped to study were no longer in regular use or were in the process of disappearing altogether. With regard to those still practised, I have witnessed most of them, as wedding and hunting rites, thanksgiving after the birth of a calf, circumcision, burial and quite a few minor ones. Several rites were re-enacted specially for me, but on such occasions it struck me forcibly that people never suffered themselves to a merely playing of the ritual, but performed it in earnest.

One inevitable gap arose from my inability to witness certain women's rituals from which men are excluded. I saw only a very small part of them.

1. First interviews

In the beginning I tried to interview people myself with the help of my assistant as interpreter. Soon, however, I discovered the disadvantages of such a method.

My questions were largely framed by my western outlook, and were further limited by my ignorance of the rituals concerned and the people's way of life. There were also the many shades and degrees of social intercourse which play so great a part in making talk both gratifying and useful.

One needs to know a good deal before being able to put the right questions in the appropriate way in order to receive the desired information.

Further, my presence frequently proved a handicap and inhibited the unrestrained and enjoyable development of an interview.

Owing to the rather complaisant attitude of my informants and their habitual politeness, I often failed to recognize their real reluctance to answer certain questions, nor was I aware always of their general unease in my presence.

> Our interview with Sabbo [an old hunter] was not very good. To be in your room made him nervous. He was not really aware what we wanted from him. Of course I realize you cannot perceive this. (Mirresa Gamtesa)

All my informants preferred not to be seen by other people when they were talking to me for a longish time. They feared accusations of passing on to me 'the secrets of their people', the more so since they could easily be suspected of receiving some reward from me. It was liable to result in gossip and friction between them and their neighbours – people on whose sympathy and cooperation they depend to such a great extent in everyday life.

Another factor was their concern that I would pass on their information to my 'brothers', the parish priests. Some of the subjects I was interested in pertained to the very fields of which they preferred their parish priest to remain in ignorance.

Some, too, made me promise that I would not pass on their names and information 'to Addis Ababa', that is to the Amharic government.

During interviews in an Oromo house, they were often hampered by the knowledge that they could be overheard by other inmates or by neighbours standing outside. For what, indeed, passes unnoticed and disregarded in a neighbourhood such as theirs? My very presence in the house could not fail to foster other people's curiosity, even suspicion.

Once an informant was telling us a story of bygone times when women ruled the country. Suddenly he broke off his tale and shifted to another subject. It was only afterwards that I was told that, at that precise moment, our host's wife had showed her face in the doorway.

The fear of having said too much did not arise, at times, until the interview was finished with. The day after his first talk with me, Shagerdi Bukko returned to my assistant, urging him: "My son, please, destroy my voice in that 'radio' (the tape-recorder). Yesterday, I was telling lies. It was the *araqi* (home-made alcohol) which made me do so."

Most informants remained suspicious, for some time, that I myself (as a priest) or my young assitant (as an 'educated man') would mock their customs and beliefs. Before telling me some mythical stories (it was not by any means his first interview) Shagerdi once remarked: "I do not want to invent things myself. I will only tell you what I was told by others. I have nothing to do with whether it is true or not." On which Mirresa commented later on: "He was only speaking that

way, because he feared I would laugh at him, since I am an educated man."

An informant's personal circumstances, too, may prevent talk on certain topics. For instance, his less honourable descent, known to all but never spoken of in his presence, or certain facts of his personal life. No researcher can possibly be informed in time about such things.

It was exceptional for an informant to stick to the questions. They preferred to speak about a variety of subjects according to the ideas which occured to them on the spur of the moment. So, from hunting the conversation would shift to dreams, from dreams to the particular people involved, and so to songs or stories, from stories to the ancient laws. They had no idea of any limitation in the information we wanted at the moment. I also think I am right in suspecting some of them of doing this, sometimes, to hide their ignorance of the things they were asked in the course of the interview. In everyday life they felt themselves unjustly regarded by the young as ignorant people; here, at the interview, suddenly the roles were reversed and they did not hesitate to make the most of it. Under the influence of some cups of *araqi* they, at times, warmed up to their subject to a degree they later regretted.

It was of primary importance to have them at ease and enjoy giving their information. My assistants, being Oromo themselves, had a keen feeling for the old people's sensitivity in this regard, for their satisfaction in being able to display their knowledge and experience, and for their fear of exposing their ignorance. As far as the warming up was concerned, they too, usually enjoyed it thoroughly. They themselves were greatly interested in these things, unasked for and unknown to them, the more so, since the old men's stories, sometimes, included things about their own family which they had never heard of. So I remember how an older informant once told Mirresa that he had been present when the latter's father had been adopted by his childless uncle. The subject of the interview in question had nothing to do with the ritual of adoption, but naturally it became so now.

And then this remark of Shagerdi Bukko, also to Mirresa:

> My son, keep the people's sympathy. You are from a good house, but you are also hot-tempered people. I heard from N.N. who is an old man now, how your grandfather once was at a beer-party. While he was drinking, another man said something wrong to him. Your grandfather jumped up and killed him on the spot.

Another disadvantage, resulting from my first method, was certainly that, whenever I was in the party myself, appointments for interviews were always more difficult to make ... and to change when it was needful. The latter happened easily, for example, when my informant was unexpectedly visited by friends or kinsfolk.

Once, the missionary who knew the language best, told me: "I am well aware that I am still speaking like a child." After that he began commenting from experience that even Oromo themselves often fail to understand each other properly. One of the reasons for this, I presume, is the great number of Matcha clans which are represented in the area. There are noticable differences in the dialects of clans which live remote from each other. Another factor is the difference in language between generations. Apart from these genuinely linguistic problems, it just often happens that people easily lose the thread of their thoughts or confuse their speech for a variety of reasons. However, even without these confusions, I grew increasingly aware that there are so many shades of meaning in their speech, that I felt I myself would never be able to trust my own understanding of them, even had I come to know the language much better than I did.

2. Another method

For all these reasons I gradually shifted to another method of interviewing people – a method favouring more freedom for my informants and for my assistants.

As far as possible I would prepare the interview in such a way that my helper understood very well what I required. After this, I left it to him to chose the place and time, and often the informants as well. At the same time, I encouraged him to fill out my questions by adding others of his own. Most interviews were recorded on tape (some informants, however, were rather put off by a tape-recorder so that my helper had to write the interview afterwards). Then the interview was taken through with me, and elucidated by my assistant. Gaps were filled in on following occasions.

The new method soon proved to be more rewarding.

a. I obtained a good deal of information I had never thought of asking about.
b. The interviews became more reliable.
c. Each of my assistants built up a group of informants of his own, according to his family and friends. These were primarily his parents and further kinsfolk, especially the older ones: grandparents, uncles

and aunts. Some were living a day's walk from my house. Good relations were carefully built up with less known informants.

d. My assistants were quick to learn the right ways of getting the information required. For example:

> I never mention one informant's name to another. So they will never say that I am passing their words to others. Instead I say: "I have read somewhere in a book," or: "I was told long ago." In this way the person does not fear that others will hear what he is going to tell me. Nor will he be dishonoured when others say that his information was not right. (Mirresa)

e. They also learned to give valuable circumstancial comments. For example:

> While she was telling me this passage of the interview, some people happened to pass by. So she was somewhat disturbed. Perhaps she left something out. (Ensermu)

> While telling me this, my father suddenly grew very serious. He started speaking rather solemnly in a low voice. (Ensermu)

Some of these comments regarded the informant's social status such as his belonging or not to the *borana* or *gabaro*, his clan-affiliation, and such attributes may well account for differences in an individual's views and customs.

f. Since in the course of our cooperation their own interest was aroused in the things I wanted to know, they increasingly asked questions of their own – questions arising from their own Oromo background.

g. They learned to point out the difficulties they had experienced in understanding all the words used by older informants whose speech was richer than theirs, and to differentiate between their own explanation of things and the words of their informants.

h. Their very interest in their people's traditions made their relations with parents and grandparents grow warmer. Before, these older people had considered them as having no interest – to say the least – in the old ways of life. Now they grew the more eager to help them. At the same time, their understanding of what their sons were after grew better.

> My father is now a much better informant than he was previously. Before, he would go away for days to his fields to watch the crops without telling me so beforehand. Nowadays, he tells me beforehand when he wants to go and asks me: "Do you still have some questions from Father?" (Ensermu)

If, after reading all these things, the reader has the impression that my position as a priest-anthropologist was somewhat precarious, he is certainly right. On the other hand thanks to the hospitality of the Catholic missionaries I was able to extend my research over nearly ten years, a privilege hardly any researcher is given to enjoy.

PART ONE

THE MATCHA'S OWN VIEW OF THEIR PAST

Chapter 8

THE MATCHA'S COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Jarso people of bygone times [Jarso is their clan]
tell me, where were you born?
Anyhow, long life to you
like a double stemmed coffeeplant.

(A girl's song)

"When we met an Oromo we did not know, we first asked him: 'In what country you were born and what is your clan?' "
(Shagerdi Bukko)

What do the Matcha of Dembidollo area tell us of their country of origin? Without exception they are convinced that their remote ancestors once crossed the Ghibe river. As far as the place is concerned they are less sure, but those who commented on this question suggested rather a place to the north.

"After they had crossed the Ghibe river, Dadhi said to his sons: 'You, Leqa, are my eldest son: therefore lead your horses and your cattle into the country to your right. You, Sayo, are my second son: therefore you will take the backbone of the country [the high country] ahead. You, Tumme, are my third son: therefore take the land to your left.'
Leqa went to Neqemte and from there moved on to the country of Ghidami. Sayo moved to Ghimbi and from there to the country we live in at present. So it was that Dembidollo was called 'Sayo' in former times. Tumme moved to Gore and to Illubabor. Illu Abba Boru [who gave his name to this country] was a son of Tumme."

In this way they explain their presence to the west of the Ghibe river and the fact that the Leqa sub-tribe lives in the north, Sayo in Dembidollo area, and the descendants of Tumme in the present Illubabor province.

But there is more to this story: it is the fact that the spread of the three sub-tribes is associated with their crossing of the Ghibe river. This is not because this crossing was such a very great exploit; the Ghibe is not that broad or deep, nor is the current that strong most of

the year. The real reason for their mentioning this river is that they see this crossing as an emergence from the water, as their birth as a people.

1. The birth of a people

This symbolic meaning of their crossing of the Ghibe is clearer in another version in which their great law-giver and prophet Makko Billi appears as giving them their laws at the very moment of the crossing.

> "Makko Billi was first to cross the Ghibe. He went through the land on the other side, but was made a prisoner by the people who were living there. They caught him, as he walked alone through their land. The others (other Matcha) were not far behind him and Makko Billi said to the people who had made him a prisoner: 'Other people are coming after me.' But they did not understand him. He was like one who is dumb to them [they did not understand his language]. They let him live that night. Next morning he said to them: 'Come with me,' and he took them to the river where the other Oromo had begun to cross already, being just in the middle of the river with their horses and all their arms. Makko Billi took his stand on a green hill and began to speak to them: 'Listen, listen, o Oromo people.' He cried in a loud voice. 'Listen, my people. Every eight year there will be butta [the slaughtering of a bull by the members of a new *gada* set]. Every year there will be masqal [new year ritual].' Thus he spoke. 'Don't flee away,' he said. 'Follow the way *Waqa* leads you. Tomorrow you will no longer see me. Tomorrow I will not speak to you again.' At that our enemies said: 'Enough. Come with us', and taking him away they killed him."
>
> (Faisa Rufo)

This story has all the characteristics of a myth. It is the prophet Makko Billi who speaks to his people in the name of their Supreme Being. He is standing on top a green hill – a symbol and promise of life and fertility. He speaks to them at the very moment of their coming from the water and proclaims their law which represents their identity as a people. In addition, his words are the last ones to be spoken before his death; they are his testament.

[This story of Makko Billi's death is not confirmed by other, non-mythical stories in the Matcha's oral tradition. In these stories Makko Billi figures long after the crossing of the Ghibe river.]

The significance of the river-crossing in terms of the birth of a people is seen in yet a third version, equally mythical. In this version mention is made of one of the social groups in Matcha society, the *tumtu* or blacksmiths, who together with weavers and tanners constitute despised castes of artisans. They, too, have come to birth in the Ghibe river.

When I questioned the same informant about how these despised castes came to be in Matcha society, he answered:

> "When they crossed the Ghibe river, there were people among them who carried the tools of a blacksmith in their hands. They were smart, however; they asked others: 'Please, keep my tools for a moment; the water swallows me,' and they gave their tools to others. When these others reached the far side, they found themselves holding a blacksmith's tool in their hands: they had become blacksmiths."

So much for the Matcha of the Dembidollo area.

There are other Matcha who never crossed this river, the so called 'eastern Matcha'. They, too, trace the birth of their people to an emergence from 'a big water'.

Here follows a short interview with an older Matcha from the country of Matcha Boroda to the east of Ambo.

Q. "Where did the Matcha come from?"
A. "People say they came out of a big water."
Q. "What is the name of that water?"
A. "I do not know."
Q. "What about their blacksmiths? Were they already there?"
A. "Some of the Matcha emerged from the water as blacksmiths, others as tanners."

2. Wolabo

Other informants on both sides of the Ghibe river, among whom also some of the Dembidollo area, gave as the name of this water 'Wolabo'. Now 'Wolabo' is the name of a holy lake in the land of the

southern Guji or Jamjam Oromo, and many eastern Oromo regard this lake as the place of their origin.[16]

> "We still say *'Umen Wolabo baate* – life originated from Wolabo'. Our people was born from the Wolabo lake. While saying so, we also have in mind that, in the beginning, the life of our people was abundant and prosperous." (Gammachu Magarsa)

Other people who do not mention 'a big water' as their place of origin, often speak of 'a country at the other side of a big water', a view which anyhow also implies a crossing.

> [Even with younger people who went to school the idea persists. They only differ from the older ones in that they give a name to the country 'at the other side of the water'. They mostly mention Arabia, but sometimes, too, even Madagascar.]

3. Water as a source of life

Before speaking of other things in the people's everyday life which point to the east as their country of origin, I would like to deal with their view that all life is born from water.

They often speak of a dead person as 'having grown dry'. In doing so they compare him with a stick from which all life has gone and which can no longer be bent.

A barren woman, too, is 'dry'. She will pray to *Waqa:* "O *Waqa,* make my womb wet; make children sprout in it."

When, after slaughtering their *butta* bull, the men of the *gada* set in power went out to bless barren women, one of their blessings was: "May your womb be wet."

Even nowadays the custom still exists that a child that is still-born or died shortly after his birth is buried by the women in a marshy place. Why this custom? Shagerdi Bukko answers:

> "If her belly is wet, she will have another child. The mother is like that marshy place. They bury her child there, that her womb may remain wet."

[16] E. Haberland was the first scholar to confirm these oral traditions. He states as certain that the Oromo's country of origin has to be looked for in the highlands of Bale where they lived as both pastoralists and agriculturists, (1963:4). H.S. Lewis supports his opinion, (1965:26).

On which my young assistant Mirresa Gamtesa commented:

> "Such a child must be buried in a wet place, that goes without saying, since it is done that the woman may have another child."

A common name for girls is 'Jiddu – the wet one'.

On one occasion one of our Oromo students went to see the crater lakes of Bishoftu near Addis Ababa. He had always given me the impression that he knew next to nothing of his people's ancient ways of life, but as he was about to leave the place, he turned once more towards the lake and said: "Goodbye mother." The fine round lake reminded him of his mother's womb.

Until recently, women had a custom to throw *tchokorsa* grass, a symbol of fertility and peace, in the rivers in order to honour the water.

On all feasts, people still scatter blades of thick marsh-grass which does not dry as soon as thinner grass on the floors of their houses – a symbol of life and fertility.

> "When they build their house, they do not cover it completely so as to allow the rain to come in; they always leave some little holes in the roof that the house may be always a little wet. Water is life." (Gammachu Magarsa)

In former times it was the custom that, prior to his son's wedding-day, the bridegroom's father would cut a ritual stick for him, a symbol of the new twig his son was about to start on the genealogical tree. He did so the evening before 'since the stick should be wet', a symbol of life and fertility. The stick was a symbol of its owner; hence the custom of anointing it regularly with butter 'in order to keep it wet'.

Older people use to bless the younger ones by spitting on them. In this case the 'water' comes from the old person – a symbol of his sharing his own abundance of life with the younger ones.

When a dying father blesses his sons in this way, they receive his spittle respectfully in their hands.

The Matcha's Supreme Being, *Waqa,* whom they see as the ultimate source of all life, is also the great sender of rain. In the low-hanging rainclouds and in fog he is seen to be coming down to man. It is through rain that he gives life to man, his cattle and his crops.

When blessing his sons, a dying father may, sometimes, imitate the rain by spraying his saliva.

At the purification ritual after incest, the guilty person immerses himself in a source of mineral water, after which he puts on new clothes. He is reborn.

4. Pilgrimages to the abba muda

Until the last decades of the nineteenth century, Matcha Oromo of the extreme west went on pilgrimage to the *abba muda* (father or dispenser of anointment). Although my own informants were rather vague about his personality, we have enough information from other sources to be sure that he was one of the hereditary highpriests of the Borana tribe in the east. It was considered to be a very holy pilgrimage and the pilgrims were seen to be under the special protection of *Waqa.* Here are the various scraps of information I gleaned from different informants.

> "All the people in the *abba muda's* country are *borana*; all are of pure Oromo descent. So, only the *borana* among us could go there.
>
> The *abba muda* was a very great *qallu:* he was the most ancient of all *qallu.*
>
> [By this they want to say that he is not like the modern *qallu* among the Matcha, of whom we speak elsewhere in this book.]
>
> Before setting out, the pilgrims would spend the last night standing up. They walked with a stick in one hand and *qumbi* [myrrh] in the other. Their stick had to be very straight. While they were walking with this stick, they prayed: 'O *abba muda,* clear our way to you, make it straight and without obstacles.' During the whole pilgrimage they must abstain from sexual intercourse. They did not sleep indoors.
>
> They did not cross more than one river a day. If the source of a river was near, they would pass around it. They did so, because it did not befit them to walk quickly. Their pilgrimage was a holy one, wasn't it?
>
> They did not wear trousers but only their *buluko* [a wide blanket] which was the dress of our ancestors.
>
> If they were lost, the one who met them had to show them the right way. After having done so, he said to them: 'May you not see the *abba muda* while he is anointing you,' which means:

may his anointing with butter [on your head] be so abundant that the butter prevents you from seeing him. The *abba muda* always anoints a person with much butter: it is as we do ourselves when we cover our beehives with cowdung.

If such a man would show them the wrong way, the *abba muda* would know it from far, and when that man would go to the *abba muda* in his turn the latter would tell him: 'You thwarted my anointing.'

All Oromo through whose land they passed, would give them hospitality. Were they not men of peace? Did *Waqa* not protect them? As long as they were on their way, the python would watch their goats, the leopard their sheep and the lion their cattle.

When they reached the *abba muda's* house, they would give him their myrrh and also a bull. The *abba muda* never took money. They would tell him their problems and wishes and, after this, the *abba muda* took one single seed of their myrrh, threw it in the fire, looked at the smoke, and gave them good advice. He told them: do this, do that. He also foretold the future. The *abba muda* blessed them and anointed them abundantly. They stayed for some time with the *abba muda.*

When the time for them had come to return home, the *abba muda* would say: 'Reach your home safely and in peace.'

They went to him rejoicing and they came back rejoicing. They came back to bless the country. Their blessing was strong and stuck to a person like resin, as did their curse.

A man could only go to the *abba muda* after he had slaughtered his *butta* bull [after his *gada* set had been in power for eight years] and his son could only go there after he had gone through all the *gada* rituals.

The father went only for his own sake. He did not pass on his power of blessing to his son.

Not all *borana* could go to the *abba muda.* Only those people who were never in charge of the *kallacha* could go there.

[The *kallacha* was a highly respected ritual object and was kept in only one *borana* lineage.]

After they had come back, they were not given another name. Everybody knew that they had gone to the *abba muda.*"

In this record no informant speaks explicitly of the *abba muda's*

country as the western Matcha's country of origin. The name *'Wolabo'* is not mentioned at all. Since, however, only *borana*, the people of pure Oromo descent went there, it is clear, that the speakers regarded it as the place of their origin.

Note

While speaking about these pilgrimages, Haberland writes: "By them, the western Matcha renewed also their contact with their ancient homeland from which their ancestors migrated. These pilgrimages to the *abba muda* about which European travellers at the turn of the century had so much to report, maintained a consciousness of the unity of the Galla nation as a whole, in spite of all the clashes between distinct tribes. They only came to an end after the occupation of southern Ethiopia by the Amharas (1880–85) owing to an increasing impact of Christianity and Islam." (1963:153)

His information about these pilgrimages among the eastern Oromo tribes, as compared with mine, shows some important variations as might be expected (1967:214 ff).

K.E. Knutsson gives a good survey of the *abba muda* pilgrimages and precious data from other authors in regard to the eastern Matcha and the Tulama Oromo. The details are not always congruent with the version given above, but this does not matter a great deal as far as the general pattern of the pilgrimages is concerned (1967:147–51).

Asmarom Legesse who was with the Borana in 1967, still found quite a few of such pilgrims among them from various parts of Oromo territory who did not intend to go back to their own country. Significantly, he does not mention pilgrims from western Matchaland (1973:19).

He also says that these pilgrims had come in order to partake in the great ritual which was celebrated once every eight years in honour of the *Borana qallu*, and which has taken place, for a long time, at the shrine of Oda, a short distance to the west of the Gannale river (1973:10).

N.B. All translations of non-English texts in this book are mine.

5. The Tullu Wallel

To the north of Sayoland rises an impressive mountain, 8200 feet high, called the Tullu Wallel (Wallel mountain).

All hills and mountains are to the Matcha places of sacrifice and worship, since they are nearer to the sky, nearer to Waqa. But because of its height and huge massif the Tullu Wallel is simply *the* holy mountain of western Matchaland.

My own informants used to translate its name as 'the mountain from which we can see one another'. They based this translation on the Oromo words *'wal* – each other' and *'ilalu* – to see'.

A trustworthy author like V. Grottanelli, however, who visited the country in the thirties, was given another meaning – a meaning which connects the Tullu Wallel to their country of origin. He writes: "The name of this important Ethiopian mountain is probably Oromo, perhaps to be connected with the verb *'wallalu'* (to forget, to ignore); then it means 'unknown mountain', 'forgotten mountain'. We have mentioned ... how a Wallel mountain occurs in Oromo tradition as the country of origin of the Galla people." (1940:318)

He is supported by two other authors.

First the Frenchman Antoine d'Abbadie who stayed for a long time in eastern Matchaland (around 1845) and who speaks of the pilgrims to the *abba muda* as of people going to 'Walal' (1880:181).

E. Haberland on his part writes in regard to the traditions of the eastern *Borana* tribe: "Also a country Tullu Wolal – 'mountain of forgetting' – which equally would lie beyond the sea, is pointed at as the site of origin." (1963:82)

Hence we have good reason to presume that, in the case of my informants, we have to do with a loss of remembrance.

Ernesto Cerulli, too, writes: "The Walel is the holy mountain to the Galla of Wollega. It is there that they perform their tribe's sacrifice to God/sky; it is there that the elders hold their meetings; it is there that, according to traditional records, the second homeland of the Galla is to be found ..." (1933:82).

6. Sitting to the east

Once I witnessed a sacrificial ritual on a hill-top at which a sheep was slaughtered. The sacrifice was followed by a communal meal. All the participants were sitting in a long row. I myself was given a place among the older men on the east-side, while the younger men were sitting at the west side of the 'table'. It is, indeed, still custom that on such occasions the older people are sitting to the east, the direction from which their people came, the side nearer to their ancestors.

Chapter 9

THE MATCHA'S MOVE WESTWARDS

My grandson, however bad the times
are we have to go through at present,
the time of our move westwards was
more hard for our people.
(Ruda Kurra to his grandson Gammachu Magarsa)

1. The first pioneers

> "As we moved westwards, it was done like this: the eldest son always remained on his father's land; the other sons went in search of new land for themselves. We spread over the land like *tchokorsa* grass spreads. Thus, you find our names everywhere in the country." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

Tchokorsa grass is an important symbol in Matcha life. It is a creeper with very deep roots. Even in times of prolonged drought, it keeps alive and provides at least a little moisture for the cattle. As it creeps, it strikes new roots on either side. In this way, many *tchokorsa* plants remain connected with the mother-plant and with each other. Because of these qualities it is both a symbol of life and fertility and of peace between homesteads of the same clan, however great the distance between them may be. It plays a part in most rituals.

> "The first Oromo to come as far as this were three in number. The people of Qalitti Galabu were the first to light a fire. They did this on the mountain of the Mao (*gaara* Mao), saying: 'As far as our fires are lighted so far will our land extend.' Their fires went as far as the Birbir river.
> The people of Labu Bidaru went down to the country which is now called Samaro. They passed the night on the Gute mountain. They lit a fire and said: 'This country is ours.'
> Gobu Wadda went to Humbi. His fire went as far as the Baro river.

As the map shows, the extension of the land covered by their fires is rather impressive. In stories like these, however, some exaggeration is expected. Apart from this, we have to take into account that the

Matcha, while speaking about people, often identify ancestors and descendants. Especially the 'fires' at the Baro river refer to only a limited number of recent individual migrations.

2. The fires

In regard to their custom of lighting fires, Waquma Tollera provides an explanation.

> "When someone sets out to take possession of new land, he takes the wife-of-the-morning-of-his-life with him [his first wife]. He looks for a good plot of land on a high place and there builds a hut. He gives this hut a supporting pole and three hearth-stones, and, if he wishes, he also builds inside the hut a separation wall and makes a frontroom and a backroom with a threshold in between.
>
> [The first two things are essential to any house.]
>
> Then he asks his wife to light a fire.
>
> [This, too, is essential. It is properly the wife's task.]
>
> They do not bring any fire with them, but they make a brand-new fire by rubbing two small sticks together.
>
> [They plant the vertical stick into the other which lies on the ground and whirl it around until the dry leaves and tiny dry twigs on the bottom have caught fire.]
>
> While the wife does this, her husband says:
> 'O fire, be a fire of peace to us.
> O hearth-stones, be hearth-stones of peace to us.
> O supporting pole, be a supporting pole of peace to us.
> O threshold, be a threshold of peace to us.'
>
> ['Peace' includes fertility and well-being.]
>
> In this hut they remain for five days.
> He also makes five bundles of long dry twigs [*tomborra*] and each evening he lights one of them, that people may see it from far. In the day-time, his wife will make much smoke for the same purpose.
> After this, no Oromo may settle on that place. If he comes on the spot, he will say: 'This place has been taken already.' He

cannot take it, as the law of the people of old forbids him to do so."

Since people gave their own or an ancestor's name to the newly acquired land, it is evident that by lighting one fire after another their names grew spread throughout the country.

3. Some more aspects of their move westwards

People of the same lineage who had started their move to the west together, often became separated during the journey.

> "The first Oromo to take land to the east of Neqemte was Abba Fato ... but he journeyed on and arrived at the country of Ghidami [a long distance farther to the west], where his descendants live up to this day. His people still possess land in this country." (Qana Gabana, local historian, Neqemte)[17]

As they continued through areas already settled by Matcha, the new pioneers preferred, whenever possible, to look for protection from among new settlers of their own clan or of one friendly to them. These friends could not only help them to find suitable land on the spot (and thus strengthen their own clan locally) but, their very safety depended on such support. Not all Matcha clans were on friendly terms with one another and fighting and cattle-thieving was common.

On occasion, the incoming groups had also trouble among themselves, especially where the choice of new land was involved. A number of stories handed down from those remote times deal with this issue.

Historical truth is not primarily to be looked for in such stories: they rather provide people with a charter for their claims to the possession of the land where they are living presently.

Another aspect of these stories is that they uphold certain important values in the people's social and religious life, such as the precedence of elder brothers over the younger ones, a preference for mutual agreement rather than fighting, and the suggestion that their present situation is the work of *Waqa.* This latter feature gives them a mythical quality.

[17] Cf. my article in Journal of Ethiopian Studies, 1970.

"While moving westwards, they were accustomed to take their rest when their bulls rested and to rise when their bulls did so. Once upon a time, they began to talk of how they would split up in order to find suitable land. They said: 'Let us leave it to Waqa.' At that each group took their largest bull and said: 'Wherever our bull goes the cows will follow and we will follow too.' This they did, and wherever their bulls went and wanted to stay, they regarded that land as given them by Waqa."

[To grasp the full significance of such decisions in which their bulls play a vital part, we must remember that to the Matcha the world of their cattle represents a replica of their own human world. Men are frequently compared to bulls both in daily speech and in songs, and so are women to cows, and boys and girls to calves. In their eyes cattle are one of *Waqa's* greatest gifts since the very beginning of time.]

The above story is also told, on occasion, to explain the name of the Ethiopian province they live in: *'Wollega'*. They associate this name with the words *'wol* – each other' and *'lagachu* – abstain from, avoid'.

"So it is that our country is called 'Wollega': people decided to separate and to keep apart from each other."

Another aspect of the Matcha's move to the west was the avoidance of lowlands, which were deemed dangerous for both people and cattle. This accounts for the fact that in the lowlands on both sides of the Didesa river between Neqemte and Ghimbi, we still find various groups of earlier people, continuing to live relatively undisturbed.

In spite of this, epidemics among people and cattle seem to have occured, again and again. In one version regarding the separation of a group of pioneers, we hear:

"They said one to another: 'Let us separate. If disease breaks out among our cattle, at least some of us will be spared'."

We have already spoken of their clashes with the 'old masters of the country' especially with the Mao. The Matcha took them as slaves to

help them in the tilling of the land, to look after the cattle, and to help their wives in the heavy work such as grinding corn and collecting firewood. When speaking of the Matcha women, the Dutch traveller J.M. Schuver, who visited the northern parts of western Matchaland in 1881, writes:

> "With exception of the poorest among them ... they don't lose their charm as early as negro women usually do. This is probably due to the fact that they have the advantage of help with the heaviest work by their slaves. A girl must be very poor, indeed, to take a husband without ensuring beforehand that she will have a slave to help her." (1883:25)

We have already mentioned in passing the privileged position of the eldest son in Matcha society. According to Matcha custom, the eldest son was entitled to inherit before his father's death already the greater part of the latter's property, or, at least (as people sometimes assert) two-third of it. The rest had to be divided among the other sons who, in their turn, would receive a greater or lesser share of it according to their being the second, third, fourth or fifth son. Usually the father would end up in keeping only a modest part of his property for himself, including his house, all of which was intended to go to the youngest son after the father's death. The youngest son usually stayed behind and took care of his mother after his father had died.

To my mind, it is this custom that accounts most for the Matcha's gradual move westwards, i. e. many sons who inherited little migrated in search of new land.

To the Matcha the few *borana* of pure Oromo descent are the channel through which all blessings from *Waqa* reach them. Hence their view that all new land had to be taken at least with the blessing of these *borana.* In addition, wherever *borana* were to be found among the new settlers the highest parts of the country were reserved for them and especially the hill-tops which were places of sacrifice.

4. Some stories

The stories given here could be called clan-stories. In this case they are stories of the clan of Qalitti Galabu who, according to oral tradition was the first to settle in Sayoland. They were told me by Gammachu Magarsa, who is of this clan.

Each clan has its own stories. They are often very similar to one another; only the names differ. They are certainly the best reflection of the people's own view of their past as it is still alive in the present, be it more by its values than by the facts related in these stories.

To the Matcha time is cyclical. The past is never irrevocably the past. It lives on in the present. More, past times come back in a fixed order much as seasons do.

a. The struggle for the horra Gorba

[A *horra* is a spring of mineral water to which people bring their cattle. They themselves also drink from it. In addition, they use the horra water for rituals of purification. Gorba is the name of the land where the horra is found.]

"The *horra* Gorba is not far from Dembidollo. It lies between the land of the Aw clan [the narrator's] and that of the Galaan. Both clan-families used to bring their cattle there that they might drink from the water and be healthy, strong and fertile. But they often quarreled about the water, since it was often not sufficient for both of them. Each group claimed the property of the horra and each of them had strong arguments. It was a very serious issue, since a horra means life to the cattle and cattle is the life of the people.

The gada judges were asked to solve the conflict and, in this way, to put an end to the clashes between the two groups. But since the claims of both parties were equally strong, they decided to call the elders of both clan-families to the horra. The judges said among themselves: 'We will tell them: Both of you have to go home and bring a white bull to the horra as soon as possible. The party who will be first to slaughter this bull near the horra will be the owner of the horra.'

The judges' decision was secret, but in one way or another the Galaan heard of it. So, on the day of the meeting, they hid a white bull not far from the horra somewhere in the forest. The Aw knew nothing of this and their herds were far away. The judges informed the clans of their decision and the latter agreed with it. The men of Aw immediately ran away to get a white bull.

While his men were away, the leader of the Aw heard of the Galaan's trick. He went to the judges. 'I have something to ask you,' he said. '*Korman namamo korma sa'atu tchala?* – which is greater: a human bull or a real bull?' – 'A human bull is greater,' they said. 'I am the bull,' the leader said. He went to the horra, cut his throat and made his blood flow into the horra. In this way the horra Gorba passed into the ownership of the Aw."

b. How the Yaya got the land of Rogge Badda

"The Yaya arrived in Sayoland after Qalitti Galabu. At that time, most of the land was already taken by Qalitti Galabu's people. So the leader of the Yaya went to Qalitti Galabu to ask him for more land. He asked him for the land of Rogge Badda which they wanted very much. Their leader went to Qalitti Galabu again and again, but every time Qalitti Galabu refused. The Yaya were near to give up all hope, when their leader hit upon the idea of asking the help of Qalitti's wife. He knew she was on their side. So he asked her what to do. She told him: 'You must be impudent to him; you must make him furious.'

So one morning the Yaya leader presented himself again before Qalitti and asked once more for the land. Qalitti refused again. 'How many times I have told you already,' he replied. 'Never, never I will give you that land.' At that the Yaya leader did what Qalitti's wife had adviced him to do. He jumped up and with his finger under Qalitti's nose he said: 'You greedy man, you refuse my clan such a small plot of land?' And he went on insulting him in this and many other ways.

At that Qalitti, too, jumped up furious. He drew his knife and cut off the other's finger, shouting: 'Take this [your finger] and take the land!' From that day onwards Rogge Badda belongs to the Yaya clan."

c. Qalitti Galabu's stratagem

"Qalitti Galabu had hardly settled in the country of Sayo, when a conflict broke out between him and Abba Dasa (not the petty despot of that name) of Galaan. The Galaan wanted to extend their territory unto the Methi river. They sent messengers to Qalitti in order to inform him of their intention to wage war if necessary. Qalitti had not enough men at his disposition to make a bold stand against this enemy. Therefore, he sent three men

to Sayo Badda country in the north – the country where he had come from himself – to ask his clanspeople there to help him. But the three men never came back. So it is that we have a saying about people who are sent out for something and do not come back: 'He stayed away like the messengers of Doyu [Qalitti's clan].' So Qalitti had to fight the Galaan alone. He had only nine men [A symbolic figure].
Therefore he had made eighty-one different leather jackets for them, each in a different colour. He also gave each of the men 9 horses of different colours. With these the nine men went to nine fords in the Methi river. There they hid their horses and jackets. When the Galaan arrived, they first showed themselves on one horse and with one of the jackets. They then galoped quickly back to the ford to change horse and jacket. After this they did the same again, and so on, nine times. The Galaan were utterly taken aback: 'Look,' they said, 'Qalitti Galabu has got reinforcements,' and they retired. But Qalitti and his men went after them. Qalitti kept Abba Dasa on the run and forced him to leave his stool [the symbol of his authority and leadership] and in the end he speared Abba Dasa's horse. It happened under a sycamore tree. The sycamore became the border between Doyu and Galaan country. Qalitti rode back and picked up Abba Dasa's stool. This stool is still in my father's house. It is eight generations old."

d. The independent move of Shoi Robe

"The Busasi, the overlords of the Mao people, refused to submit to the law of Makko Billi [the Matcha's great law-giver]. At that Makko Billi declared war on them. He said:
'The Busasi, when we sell them, they are money [pointing especially at women and girls], when we cut them [their testicles], they are trophies.' All Matcha of Sayoland fought on the side of Makko Billi, except for the Alequ clan. Their leader was the famous Shoi Robe. People still call him *'gamna Sayo* – the wise man of Sayo.'
This Shoi Robe wanted to keep good relations with the Busasi. He said to his people:
'Among people we stick to the Busasi; among cereals we stick to barley.' The Alequ live in the highlands and grow much barley.

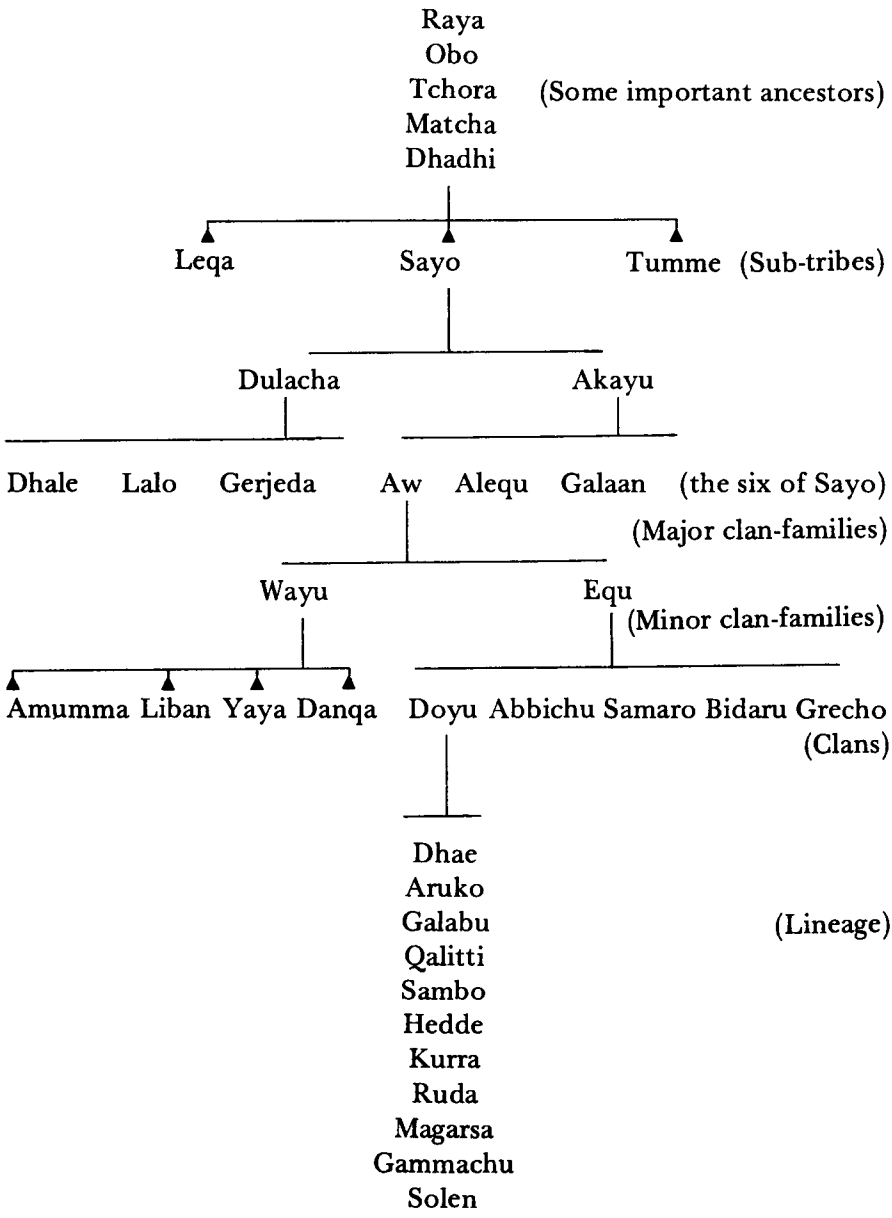
Nearly all the Busasi were killed in this war, except for two brothers."

[Taken literally, this story puts Makko Billi on the scene as still living at that time. It could, however, well be that he stands here for the Matcha people in general.]

Chapter 10

CLANS AND LINEAGES IN SAYOLAND

1. The people's own view of their genealogical tree



The dominant clans around Dembidollo and anyhow the clans who were first to settle there are:

1. Doyu, Abbichu, Samaro, Bidaru, Grecho who together form the minor clan family of Equ.
2. Amumma, Liban, Yaya, Danqa who together form the minor clan family of Wayu.

Each clan comprises a number of lineages. The line of descent of only one lineage is given here, that of my assistant Gammachu Magarsa, whose son is called Solen. His lineage is called after their ancestor Dhae.

This table was the best I was able to reconstruct from the local oral traditions, which are far from being consistant with each other.

For a further reading of this genealogical tree, the following factors must be kept in mind.

a. All my informants agreed that Qalitti Galabu was the first 'to reach the Mao mountain' to the north of Dembidollo. People of his lineage have still part of the land on the slopes of this mountain. They are all called Dhae. "What is before Dhae is clan," as his descendants Gammachu Margarsa told me.

From Gammachu's son Solen onwards we count eight generations until Qalitti (son of) Galabu. The question is, how many years we have to count for one generation. Probably 25–30 years. Indeed, according to certain oral traditions, it seems probable that the Matcha reached present western Matchaland in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Gammachu Magarsa told me that he had paid a visit to the place where Qalitti's grandfather, Aruko, has been buried, which is not far from the present town of Ambo. He presumes that Qalitti's father Galabu was buried in Sayo Badda on the eastern slopes of the Tulu Walel, which the Sayo Matcha around Dembidollo believe was one of the major stops on their journey westwards.

b. The Matcha still frequently call themselves after a distant ancestor whose 'seed' they are; so words such as "Sayo crossed the Ghibe river" or "Sayo took this land or that" do not mean that their ancestor Sayo himself did so. Similarly many areas in western Matchaland are called after remote ancestors who never actually reached the country.

c. 'Son' may often imply any male descendant, including grand- and

great-grandsons. So Equ, for example, does not need to be a son of Aw in the strict sense of the word.

d. In genealogies like this we can presume that only the names of those ancestors who for one reason or another are of some importance for the present generation are remembered. Their names are often preserved in stories, sayings or names of places, rivers and mountains.

None of my informants had anything special to say about the two sons of Sayo, Dulacha and Akayu, but their sons are still of importance. They speak of them as 'the six of Sayo from whom all of us have sprung'. In all the major clans we still find the custom of saying, when a child is born: "May he (she) be a son (daughter) of the six of Sayo."

> "In all our clans we still say when praying: 'O Waqa of the six of Sayo, send us your rain. O Waqa of the six of Sayo, keep disease away from our cattle." (Shagerdi Bukko)

Such sayings and prayers have a religious dimension of their own in that Waqa is believed to have been nearer to the six of Sayo than he is with their descendants of the present day.

> "We move away from Waqa from generation to generation. We believe that Raya could speak with Waqa face to face. We believe that the former generations were closer to him."
> (Gammachu Magarsa)

e. The place of an individual in his genealogical tree is decisive for his status in his lineage, just as the genealogical position of the lineage ancestor in relation to like ancestors is decisive for the position of his lineage vis-a-vis other like lineages. This is particularly important for the land they can call theirs and for the women they can marry. E.g. on the father's side marriage is forbidden if the boy and the girl have the seventh grandfather in common. Beyond this range of nine generations the interest in ancestors grows less; as Shagerdi Bukko put it: "After the seventh grandfather they forget one another."

Up to the seventh common grandfather a descent group is called 'balballa – door', a word we have translated by lineage. Taken in this sense a lineage is an exogamous group, 'they are of the same blood'.

Strictly speaking the name of a lineage should change at every new

generation, but in fact this is not done. We see, for example, in the diagram that the Dhae lineage counts eleven generations at the present. Accordingly a boy and girl of this Dhae lineage could marry one another without violating the law of the seven 'grandfathers'. In the meantime people commonly assert: "After the seventh grandfather the clan begins."

Members of the same clan but of different lineages may marry one another. A clan, though its members acknowledge a common ancestor, may include lineages of different Oromo descent who were inserted into it, and even lineages of non-Oromo origin who became Oromo by adoption. So a clan is first of all a social grouping, not a biological one.

2. An unsafe country

Oral tradition is full of stories about lions, elephants and other wild animals who made the country unsafe for men. But no less than these animals it was people themselves who made it impossible to one another to stay safely in the country without the protection of their lineage or, at least, of a 'strong man' who could protect them.

There were institutionalized friendly relations between some clans and lineages. They often married into each other.

> "The Lalo clan were good fighters. If you married a Lalo girl, your son would be like his mother's brother."

If a man had killed a member of a befriended clan or lineage, the law of blood-vengeance was normally complied with by peace-negotiations, the payment of a blood-price and the performance of an elaborate peacemaking-ritual.

Other clans were often rather hostile towards one another.

> "The Wayu and Equ were not always on friendly terms. When an Abbichu had killed a man of the Danqa clan, no Abbichu could appear in Danqaland. If he ventured to do so, he was killed by the Danqa. As soon as the Danqa had killed an Abbichu in their turn, the matter was settled. After this they continued being cautious with one another, but there was no further killing." (Dinsa Sarba)

Apart from enduring quarrels about land, other factors, too, played a part. The Matcha simply did not want to be in perfect peace with all

the clans surrounding them; fighting was encouraged. Having killed a man brought honour. Conceptually there is a close connection between killing by the men and childbirth by the women. (See Chapter 23)

So it was that Matchaland was not always safe for the Matcha themselves and even less for the original inhabitants and for Oromo of other tribes.

> "In former times, if you were not of the same clan as the people of the country, you could be killed by them. You yourself, Father, would never have been able to stay in our country as you do now. You would have been killed. You would have been obliged to change your nationality and to become an Oromo. You would have been obliged to become a *qollu*."
>
> (Mirresa Gamtesa)

We touch here on an interesting institution which existed for as long as clashes between clans were common, i. e. until the first decades of this century.

3. The qollu institution

It was created in favour of the following people:

a. Immigrant people, both Oromo and others

Mirresa Gamtesa's own ancestor had profited from it. As the old Dinsa Sarba, a good historian, once told him in my presence.

> "Your ancestor, Mirresa, had come from the east. He was an Oromo and his name was Wayesa. He came to our country in the service of the Amharas. He helped them to fix the boundaries between the territories of Borrayu and Jote [two minor Matcha rulers who submitted to the Amharic emperor in the last decade of the 19th century].
>
> First Wayesa stayed for some time in Borrayu's country, but he did not like it there. So he moved to the country of the Abbichu clan and joined them in a war against the Amumma who were living at this side of the Borta river.
>
> An Amumma warrior was pierced through his thigh by an Abbichu spear. The Amumma continued to cross the river with the spear still fixed in his thigh. After some days, Wayesa took himself off to the Amumma, since they were such brave men. He

said: 'I wish to become your *qollu*,' and the Amumma accepted him. Later they kidnapped a girl for him from the Alequ clan."

b. Matcha of the area expelled from their lineage for killing a member of this lineage, 'someone of their own blood', or for committing serious incest with one of them.

> "An Abbichu had killed another man of his own lineage and took refuge with the Amumma. He went to a strong man among them and asked him to become his *qollu*. In those times, strong men liked to have other people in their service to work and fight for them." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

c. People who had killed somebody of another clan or lineage whose own lineage refused to defend them against their victim's relatives, because of the social circumstances in which the homicide occured.

> "Such a man fled to another clan and put himself under the protection of a strong man who could defend him. But if he did so, he had to become a member of that clan in future. He had to become 'one body' with them." (Shagerdi Bukko)

Qollu-ship implied several things:

* The man in question first became simply a servant of his protector.
* After he had proved to be a useful helper, he was attached to his protector's lineage and allowed in everyday life to take over the latter's genealogy. It was in this nominal sense that his master on occasion would call him 'my son', not in the sense that there had been an adoption. He remained in a position of mild servitude towards him and his family.
* *Qollu*-ship was an institution for Oromo only or for people they considered as their equals. Individuals of earlier peoples such as the Mao and Anuak could not become qollu.

4. Ceremonies associated with qollu-ship

These are two in number. First the request to being accepted as a qollu; second, the ceremony of nominal insertion into the protector's lineage. The following is a compilation of three interviews: 1. Ensermu Waquma with his father. 2. Asafa Disasa with Shagerdi Bukko. 3. Mirresa Gamtesa with Dinsa Sarba.

Q. "What does the name *'qollu'* mean?"
A. "A man has killed someone and wants to save himself from being killed by his victim's family; so he flees to a strong man who is able to protect him. Before going there, he must send word saying that he wishes to come. If the strong man answers 'Yes, come,' he can go to the latter's compound. He has to take with him his weapons to show his protector his ability to fight for him."
Q. "If this man has a wife and children, is he allowed to take them with him?"
A. "Yes, he can do so."
Q. "What will he say to that strong man?"
A. "He will say: 'I killed a man. I have blood on my hands. He has tied his hands with *tchokorsa* grass [a symbol of peace and of staying alife in difficult circumstances]. He has on his head a *gomfo* which is a wreath of *tchokorsa* grass like a cap.
Thus he makes his appearance before the 'strong man'."
Q. "Does he not present him with something?"
A. "In his hands, tied with *tchokorsa,* he has two saltbars. If he is rich, he brings a bull as well. It is important that he brings his wife with him and his children, especially sons.
He extends his hands with the *tchokorsa* and the saltbars toward the strong man, saying: 'Untie me.' A helper with the strong man does this. He gives his wreath of *tchokorsa* to the helper, saying: 'My children are nine. With me we are ten. Standing under the sky and on the earth I give myself to you.'
Q. "What is the meaning of these words? Does he really have nine children?"
A. "He always says so."

[It is a ritual formula which indicates that he gives all he has. The number nine is a symbol of fullness. The formula is also used by a widow when she marries her husband's brother.
Heaven and earth are called as witnesses.]

Q. "Does the strong man accept the *qollu* merely on his own judgement?"
A. "No. Before accepting him he must consult the elders of his lineage, telling them: 'Such and such asks to be my *qollu*. He wants to be our shield. What do you think of this? Shall I take

him? And if I do, are you prepared to take upon yourselves his blood-vengeance?' – 'Yes,' they say, 'we will do this.'
Thus the man is assured that he once will be considered a member of their lineage. His children will be forbidden to marry within his new lineage or with people of the lineage he left."
Q. "In what way is he inserted into his master's lineage?"
A. "On that day, his master must kill an ox and make beer and honeywine."
Q. "Why not the *qollu* himself?"
A. "He gives himself, his wife and his children to that strong man. The strong man will say to the elders of his clan: 'Apply the law of *qollu*-ship for me."
Q. "How do they apply this law?"
A. "He will call the *gula.*"
Q. "What do you mean by *gula?*"
A. "People who have gone through all the rituals of the *gada,* and who have their ruling-period behind them.
These *gula* must be of other lineages than the master's lineage. They will address the strong man thus: 'This *qollu* who came from such and such a country, from such and such a clan and from such and such a lineage in that clan, and who killed such and such a man, are you really willing to admit him into your lineage?'
'Yes, I want to take him.'
'Will you fight to death for his sake, if he is killed?'
'Yes, I will do so.'
'Are you prepared to kill for his sake?'
'Yes, I am prepared to do so.'
'Will you search for him, when he is lost?'
'Yes, I will search for him.'
'Will you give him a plot of land?'
'Yes, I will do so.'
In this way they speak to him. After this the *qollu*, too, must promise all things he has to do according to the law. He promises to fight for his former protector and to serve him in other ways. Then the strong man hands him a new *dhaabatta.*

[A *dhaabatta* is the ritual stick a son is given by his father on his wedding-day as a symbol of the new twig he is about to start on the genealogical tree. The *qollu's* former stick has become mean-

ingless now that he has forsaken his genealogical tree, his former lineage, and is about to be attached to a new one.]

The *gula* also ask him whether he was a *borana,* a *gabaro* or a blacksmith in his former clan, and they will tell him that he will be the same in his new clan.

Finally the *qollu* thanks his protector and his new clan, saying: 'My son will be a son of your lineage. My daughter will be a daughter of your lineage. If I die, my wife will not remain without a ring.

[She will be given a new husband by the new lineage.]

I will be at your side on rivers and on mountains. I'll follow you wherever you go to fight.'

After this the feast begins. The ox is slaughtered and strips of his skin are distributed among the people. The strong man gets the longest strip, the *gula* get somewhat shorter ones and the *qollu*, too, gets one but only a short one."

5. The common law

The Matcha of Sayoland had established a new *gada* area whose centre was the Mao mountain. It was the highest point in their country, closest to heaven. It was in their common ceremonies and rituals on the slope of this mountain, 'near to *Waqa'*, that the clans of the area found a closer unity. Here, every eighth year, they proclaimed anew their common law and brought common sacrifices. This common law was seen as a reflection of the law once proclaimed, according to oral tradition, by *Waqa* under an *oda* tree. Hence the *gada* laws, too, were proclaimed anew under a big *oda* tree on the slope of that mountain.

In spite of this, Matchaland remained a relatively unsafe country, since "the *gada* system is more an experience of common values than an effective institution" (P.T.W. Baxter). In their rites in general, and especially in those on the Mao mountain, people recognized again and again that peace was *Waqa's* will and a prerequisite for his blessing. On the other hand, periodical fighting, too, was seen as desirable; making peace again, however, was essential.

Between people of the same *gada* area this peace was more readily maintained or regained than between people of different *gada* areas.

6. Hierarchy among the clans

Another factor of unity was the common recognition of the elder *borana* lineages as ritual and socio-political leaders. Among the 'six of Sayo' Dhale was the eldest and his younger brothers came next according to their place in the hierarchy of brothers. This hierarchy was maintained for their offspring. The concept at the basis of this hierarchy was mainly religious, as is evident, among other things, in the precedence given to the elder brothers and their offspring at the performance of rituals. They were considered to be nearer to *Waqa.*

PART TWO

THE MATCHA'S EXPERIENCE OF THE SUPERHUMAN

Further on in this book the Matcha will present themselves to the reader many of their rituals, symbols and prayers.

It may help therefore to have, at this stage, some idea of their concept of *Waqa* (God/sky) and of the many ways they feel he reveals himself to them both in man and in the world which surrounds them.

Chapter 11

WAQA

1. The name

The word *'waqa'* has a double meaning. The first is 'sky', i. e. the vault of the sky as we see it. The second approximates what is meant by the English word 'God'; but, as we will see, it comprises more than that, more than 'the Supreme Being, creator and ruler of the universe' in the western sense.[18]

It comprises more, since it includes countless particular manifestations of *Waqa* in this world, particularizations of his creative work which are conceived as beings. Hence the word 'divinity' will often be a better translation than 'God'. "Divinity ... can be used to convey to the mind at once *a* being, a *kind* of nature or existence, and a quality of that kind of being; it can be made to appear more substantive or qualitative, more personal or general, in connotation, according to the context ..."[19]

However, even this will not solve all problems. Hence I prefer throughout this book simply to use the Matcha word *'Waqa'*. Whether people mean by this word *'waqa'* the vault of the sky, the Supreme Being, one of his particularizations or a combination of these things, usually becomes clear enough from the context.

2. Waqa as the vault of the sky

In this sense the word is used when the Matcha speak of the birds as flying 'in the sky'. Or in a prayer like this:

"Waqarra nuf hatollu;	May he (Waqa) give us good things from the *sky*
lafarra nuf hatollu.	and good things from the earth."

Or in the pleasing saying:

"Waqa ganaf fagarra ijolle hinamanani.	You can trust neither the rainy season sky nor babies' bottoms."

[18] Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary.

[19] Thus G. Lienhardt in his fine study about Dinka Religion (1961:29, 30) where he met with similar difficulties in translation.

3. Both meanings are combined in the following examples

A prayer:

"Na bobasi, ya Waq	Lead me out, o Waqa,
garaake jela an bobafadhe.	(as) I led my cattle out under your belly [the sky]."

Or when a mother threatens her troublesome child by saying, pointing at the thunder: "Waqa is grumbling."

In several of their many rituals the women throw tchokorsa grass (a symbol of fertility and peace) in the river, of which an old woman said: "The grass is our gift to Waqa. The river carries it far, far away, to where Waqa and the earth meet."

Matcha often speak of the 'dark Waqa *(Waqa guracha)*, meaning the dark sky with the clouds that tell of rain to come. As an old man explained to us: "His belly is dark (guracha), therefore we call Him 'the dark Waqa'. In the following blessing the meaning of the 'dark sky' and of the Supreme Being go together:

"Gurachi garaa tchabbi sif	May the dark one with white hail
hakennu.	in his belly give you [good things]."

Similarly they call the rainbow: "Waqa's girdle", and they sacrifice on the top of a hill to be 'nearer to Waqa'. If during the sacrifice the clouds descend on the hill-top, they say: "Waqa has come down to us. Praise be to him."

The Matcha believe that at the very beginning of time, Waqa, the Supreme Being, was much nearer to man. "He was walking the earth in the shape of an old man, and people could ask anything of Him." However, they also say: "At that time he was lying with his belly on the earth, fertilizing it with his rain."

Finally, an example from my own experience as a priest. When there was drought and people needed rain badly to plough and sow, I prayed with them for rain. Once, when it rained too heavily for the crops, I proposed to my assistants that we compose a prayer for the clouds to yield to the sun. Their reaction was: "How can we do that, Father? It would be like praying that Waqa may withdraw from us!"

4. Waqa as the Supreme Being

4.1 Source of all life

As the Supreme Being *Waqa* is seen first of all as the source of all life. Giving life, indeed, is reserved to Him alone. Matcha have a special word for this work of *Waqa,* the verb 'umu'. It is best translated by the English word 'create' in the sense of 'causing something to exist', without the western connotation of a creation out of nothing by a Supreme Being who existed before which latter idea is alien to the Matcha. They do not visualize *Waqa* existing outside this world in time or space. In this sense *Waqa* is as much of this world as the vault of the sky. They have no myths about the creation of the world as we find them e. g. in the bible. When they speak of the beginning of time the world and even man himself are already in existence.

While speaking of the conception of a child in his mother's womb, Waquma Tollera told me:

> "Children are born from the blood of the father and mother. If Waqa wishes, he causes a child to sprout in the mother's womb. Man does not know how Waqa does this; he can only ask Waqa for a child. No man on earth has any idea of it; it is a mystery. We do not see when Waqa creates a child, but we know that it is he who creates the child, he alone. All men are his creatures. Waqa alone creates."

Waquma Tollera's very name points to this in a double way: his own name *'Waquma'* means '*Waqa* creates', and his father's name *'Tollera'* means 'He *(Waqa)* has been good to us'. Other names say much the same, such as *'Waqjira* (Waqa exists), *Waqgari* (Waqa is good), *Waqtole* (Waqa has been good to us), *Kennasa* (His gift), *Waqo* (for a boy), and *Waqe* (for a girl). I know a family where all the children have a name with *'Waqa'* in it.

But men are not *Waqa's* only creatures.

> "We do not say: *'Waqa* creates' for men only. We say: 'He creates all things'." (Ambassa Waqo)

Once Gammachu Magarsa related the following conversation with his grandfather:

> "I had spoken with my grandfather about Waqa. I had told him I wanted to see Waqa, or at least something of him. At that my

grandfather said to me: 'To Waqa we are only very small ants. How then can we see him? Did you ever look at ants, my grandson?' – 'Yes, I did,' I said. – 'Do you think they saw you?' – 'I don't know. They did not seem to care about me. I was looking at them and they all went their own way.' – 'So it is with us and Waqa, my grandson. You were to those ants as Waqa is to us. You saw them, but they did not see you. In the same way, Waqa sees us but we do not see Waqa. However, because of many things we know that he is there."

It is clear that the *Waqa* of whom they speak here is not the vault of the sky but rather the Supreme Being, invisible to man. As Waquma Tollera put it:

"We do not see *Waqa,* we only see his works."

His works, the first of which is the giving of life, – life which is nearly as great a mystery to people as *Waqa* himself.

It made Shagerdi Bukko give the following advice to my assistants:

"My sons, when you leave your old house because you have built a new one, don't set fire to it. There are many little creatures in that old house. It is not good to kill all that life."

They have a feeling, indeed, that all life belongs to *Waqa* and that man is not free to dispose of it. The animals and plants they kill for food were "blessed for them by *Waqa*" for this purpose.

This accounts for the readiness with which Matcha adapted the custom of the Ethiopian Christians and the Muslims slaughtering an animal only in the name of the Holy Trinity or of Allah; traditionally they never ate any animal without cutting the throat so that the meat would be drained from blood. Blood is the seat of life, or rather it *is* life, and life should be given back to Waqa.

4.2 Some more reflections of this view in everyday life

a. The *borana* who pride themselves on pure Oromo descent and who are regarded by their fellows as 'the eldest ones', are seen as possessing more life and life of an higher quality than the others, much as the water of a spring is purest at its source. But this privilege from Waqa obliges them to impart this life to the others by being a continual source of blessing to them. They are to their people a link with Waqa.

b. In another sense, apart from descent, all old people – people 'saturated with years', are also considered to be nearer to Waqa. Both within and outside rituals they are asked for their blessing. People regard their blessing not so much as a prayer to Waqa on the suppliants' behalf than as a passing on to them of the blessing (life) these old people have received from him.

[This view of what blessing is, is also evident in the statement: "The sons of a father are, sometimes, angry with their old father if he blesses too much. They fear that not enough blessing will be left for them."]

> "When we were still children and playing near our house, and an old man passed by, he would call us and give us his blessing. While giving us his blessing, he would say: 'May *Waqa* make you grow up' or simply: 'Grow up'."

Old people, indeed, feel themselves blessed by *Waqa,* and they are happy to be asked for their blessing. The custom is decreasing, nowadays, which made an old man complain:

> "In former times, old people could bless, but, nowadays, who asks for our blessing?"

Their blessing was often accompanied by spitting. This spitting could be in a single action as the word is understood in English (*tufu*) or a sprinkling of their saliva like rain (*biifu*). In the latter case the connection with Waqa was closer. Generally, they spit on the children's heads, while adults receive the saliva into their hands.

I will always remember the happy look on the face of an old woman who did not know that I was a priest, when, after having given her something, I held out my open hands that she might spit in them in blessing.

My assistant Asafa Disasa, still a young man, once told me:

> "When I had helped an old man or woman by carrying a load on my shoulders, they blessed me. They would spit on my shoulder, saying: 'May this shoulder one day carry a buffalo-tail.' [The tail is the trophy of a buffalo-killer.] And when my sister had

carried something on her back for them [girls do not carry things on their shoulders], they would spit on her back, saying: 'May this back one day carry a baby'."

c. Another idea connected with *Waqa* as a source of life is that people who are regarded as being near to Him in a special way such as those who have the gift of prophecy or of knowing the secret meaning of things that happen to others, are expected to have long life. Thus in a story of Shagerdi Bukko about a man who had seen several wonderful things and set out to ask such a man (*raji*) what they could mean.

> "... In the end he reached the hamlet of the *raji*. He entered the first house. In this house he found an old man, very weak. He asked him: 'Are you the *raji*?' – 'No,' the man said, 'the *raji* is my grandfather. He is living up there.' So the man went to the next house. There, too, he found an old man. The man was lying on his bed and seemed even weaker than the former one. 'Are you the *raji*?' the man asked him. 'No, I am not; the *raji* is my father.' – 'Where can I find him?' – He is somewhere outside not far from here.' So the man started looking for the *raji* in the open field. There he saw a man who was taming a horse. The man went somewhat nearer to him and shouted: 'I am looking for the *raji*. Do you know where he is?' The other man replied: 'I myself am the *raji*'..."

The ritual leader of the *gada*, a man whose position approximates that of a priest, had himself to be a symbol of *Waqa's* blessing. He must be of pure Oromo descent, healthy and able. His family, too, must be blessed by *Waqa*: his first wife and his eldest son must both be alive and there must be no serious disease in his family. He was forbidden to kill, unless for sacrifice, nor was he allowed to cut trees or to 'wound the earth' by ploughing.

d. Nowadays, these *borana* have lost much of their former socio-religious status, though they are still asked by people to bless them and their cattle. To a certain extent their position as 'people of blessing' (blessed themselves and passing on this blessing to others) has passed to the priests. "Priests are *'abba jirenya* – dispensers of life' people say. Like the ancient ritual leader of the *gada* they are not allowed to kill. Mothers would bring their children to me, saying: "Father, make my child grow up for me." As they asked from the *borana* in former times

people also ask from their priests that they bless whenever an opportunity presents.

4.3 Dependence on *Waqa*: how people experience this

a. Proverbs

Mana Waq ijaretu ijarama.	A house that is built by Waqa will be completed.
Kan bela fidu Waqayo;	It's Waqa who brings hunger;
kan qufa fidus Waqayo.	it's Waqa who brings a full stomach.
Kan Waqni uwise hindaaru.	The one Waqa clothes will not go naked.
Kan Waqa abdette hindhabu.	Who trusts on Waqa will not lack anything.
Namni yaada, Waqni hinguta.	Man wishes, Waqa fulfills.
Waq jiraf adun bae.	Waqa is there [therefore] the sun rises.
Kan nama dhukubsachisu Waqa;	It's Waqa who makes a person sick;
kan nama fayisus Waqa.	it's Waqa who restores him to health.
Waqni hinarrifatu	Waqa is never in a hurry;
lafa jedhe hinolu.	but he is always there at the proper time.

b. Individual sayings:

"If Waqa makes us live, we live;
if he makes us die, we die;
if he heals us, we are restored to health;
if he gives us to eat, we eat;
if he refuses it to us, we die." (Shagerdi Bukko)

"People think: Waqa exists; therefore they pray to him.
Nobody says: Waqa does not exist.
They are glad that he is there ..." (Waquma Tollera)

c. A prayer:

"O *Waqa,* you do not say 'no' to those who call your name;
O *Waqa,* you do not withdraw from those who lean on you."

d. We have already spoken of the blessings given by the *borana* and by old people. This book is full of them. As Paul T.W. Baxter writes about the Borana Oromo in the east, Matcha "daily social intercourse is floating on blessings". So a few of them may suffice here.

May Waqa give you long life.
May Waqa keep you alive together.
May Waqa's blessing be upon you.
May Waqa add to what he has given to you already.
May Waqa have mercy on you.
May Waqa make you live in a house where peace reigns.
What you have produced may Waqa make it grow up for you (calves, children, crops).
What you have sown may Waqa make it sprout for you.
May Waqa give you his peace.

e. Customs in daily social intercourse

When confronted by a problem, their own or that of others, people rarely fail to say: "*Waq waya* – Waqa knows what is best" or "*Waq jira* – Waqa exists".

While speaking of hopes for the future they readily add: "*Yo Waqa-yo jedhe* – If it is Waqa's will." They fear to speak as if they have their fate in their own hands.

The same fear is manifest, if someone asks them how many children they have or how many cattle. As Asafa Disasa once told me:

> "If somebody asks me: 'How many children do you have?', I reply: 'You want to know how many children I have? Waqa gave me three children.' I would not say: 'I *have* three children.' Nor will I ever say so in regard to my cattle or even my chickens. We do not count whatever has life.
> People can ask us: 'How much do you have,' when dollars, chairs or containers are concerned, but not if the things concerned have life."

And he continues:

> "Even if we are in trouble, we must always say thanks to Waqa. If there is no food in the house or if somebody is very sick, our first answer to a person who asks: 'How are you', is always: 'We

are well.' It's only after further talk that we will tell him of our problems.

Even if somebody is very, very sick and near to death, he should first say to other people who pay him a visit: 'I feel better, thanks to Waqa.' The others may say: 'He is very sick'. His wife may say: 'He is very sick'. But he himself should say: 'I feel better.'

Waqa is always giving you something, if only a little life. So I should continue saying: 'I feel well.' Waqa can take our life whenever he wishes, so we have to say 'Thank you' to him at every moment."

And my assistant Gammachu Magarsa joins Asafa:

"The presence of life means the presence of *Waqa.* Wherever you say 'There is no life', you say: '*Waqa* is not there'."

f. Waqa's praise is fourfold

There is a saying: *"Galanni Waqayo afur* – Waqa has to be praised four times." For example, after a day of communal work, people say four times a prayer of praise for Waqa, and to stress this these prayers should be said by four different people.

This praise of Waqa is felt to be indispensable – first as a recognition of what people feel reality to be and, second, as a prerequisite for receiving further blessing from Waqa in the future. People rarely say: "I am well" without adding: "Thanks to Waqa."

"I remember that once the whole country was suffering from draught. One evening while we were eating together, we heard suddenly the first drops of rain on our roof. Immediately my father and mother rose up, turned to the east, lifted their hands towards heaven and said: "Be praised, o Waqa, you gave us rain. We trusted in you and you have heard our prayer." After this they sat down again and we continued eating." (A teacher)

And the same teacher added significantly: "Before I went to school I knew more of Waqa than I did after."

"There are people who always complain. But as soon as they have left, the others will say: "*Galata Waqayo balesa* – He destroys the praise of Waqayo in our country." (Asafa Disasa)

5. Waqa knows all things

> "We Oromo believe that nothing happens on this earth without Waqa. We have also a saying: *'Ganaman baanif Waq jela himbaani* – Man may set out early in the morning but he never will escape from beneath the sky/Waqa.'
> And we have also another saying: *'Waqni garaa dhaga kesayu beka* – Waqa even knows the heart of a stone'." (Asafa Disasa)

The latter saying is often used at the taking of an oath. Once I asked a man to take an oath that he had not taken his brother's land. He lifted his hands towards heaven and pointing to a big stone at his feet said: "*Waqa* who knows even the heart of this stone, knows that I am telling the truth."

> "When we have lost something we cannot find anymore, we say: 'O *Waqa,* you have eyes, you have ears; we do not see, we do not hear. You even know the heart of a stone. What we have lost and cannot find, show it to us." (Waquma Tollera)

In folk-stories about people in need we find frequently prayers like this: "O *Waqa*, you know all things. You know that we are without food for two days ..."

6. The Most High

> "Sometimes we say in prayer: 'O *Waqa,* we are your little black ants.' This we say in order to make ourselves small before *Waqa.*" (Waquma Tollera)

Until recently the Matcha also expressed the great distance between themselves and Waqa by abstaining from calling him by his name.

> [In everyday life a woman never calls her husband by his name, nor is she herself ever called by her name by her in-laws. "This is out if respect" as people say. In society at large only an inferior is called by his name. Equals call one another by their name only when they are among themselves.]

An old, deeply religious man (now a Christian) once remarked:

> "The old rituals of our fathers were good; there was nothing wrong in them. Nowadays, people are saying that crows and insects are eating all their grain. But this happens, because they leave the old prayers by which they asked these creatures to be satisfied with a little. There was much more blessing in those times when people did not call *Waqa* by his name but said: 'Aabaa' or 'Ulfin'. O, my people, you began to call Ulfin by his name [*Waqa*]!" [20]

Waquma Tollera joins him; here follows a conversation between him and his son Ensermu:

> *E.* "What did people call Waqa in the beginning?"
> *WT.* "In the very beginning they said 'Waqa', but soon people started saying 'Ulfin' out of respect for his name. It was out of respect that they stopped calling him by his name."
> *E.* "What does the name 'Ulfin' mean?"
> *WT.* "It denotes Waqa's greatness. He is above all things."
> *E.* "Do people never give this name to a man?"
> *WT.* "Of course not! But later on, very gradually, people started speaking lightly; they were easygoing and began to say 'Waqa' again, and later even 'Waqayo'.
>
> ['Waqayo' is indeed, a diminutive with a connotation of familiarity; e. g. *'gurba'* means 'boy' while *'gurbayo'* could be translated by 'my boy'.] [21]
>
> *E.* "Was it through coming of the Amharas that they started doing this [i. e. under the influence of Christianity]?"
> *WT.* "No, they had already started doing so before the coming of the Amharas."

[20] *Aabaa* is best translated by 'Most High'. It is in this sense that we still find the name in the bible translation of Onesimos Nesib which was made between 1886 and 1897. *'Ulfin'* is probably connected with *'ulfina* – honour'. The word *'Aabaa'* should well be distinguished from *'abbaa* – father'.

[21] Foreign missionaries, especially the protestants, encouraged the use of *'Waqayo'*, since this name detached God's name from the connotation of 'sky'. The process is still going on. The protestant editors of a revised and adapted edition of Onesimos' Bible never use the word *'waqa'* except to indicate the vault of the sky.

Ensermu himself once told me:

> "I was speaking with my mother about the names people gave to *Waqa* in former times. She told me that her father always grew angry when children called *Waqa* by his name."

What Ensermu says here of his grandfather, Gammachu Magarsa told me of both his grandfather and his father:

> "It is the *borana* particularly who called *Waqa* 'Ulfin' or 'Umo'. When we were still children we often said: '*Waqa*'. Our grandfather never failed to reproach us. He would say: '*Agi fudhaddha*'. I still don't know how to translate this but it meant something like 'Ask forgiveness'. We had then to spit on the ground and say several times: '*Agi, agi, agi*'. We had to spit out the wrong word we had spoken.
> My father did the same. But, now he has given up the custom of not calling *Waqa* by his name."

Nowadays, one still hears these ancient names of honour in certain expressions like "*Aabaatu beka* – Aabaa knows" or "*Umotu beka* – Umo knows" or "*Saffu Aabaati* – It is the mystery of Aabaa" or as in a saying like "*Buddenni Aabaati nyatame hindhumu* – The bread Aabaa gives never runs out".

Another name for *Waqa* is the Arabic word 'Rabbi'. "It is a good name," people will say. Indeed it seems to meet their feelings of respect as expressed in their own ancient praise-names for *Waqa.*

> "My mother always calls *Waqa* 'Rabbi'. She does so because my father's name is Waquma and because she is forbidden to call his name. A woman, as you know, cannot call her husband by his name. This is done out of respect." (Ensermu Waquma)

Although he is in one sense very near to man, *Waqa* remains the Most High, the mysterious and tremendous one. This comes to the fore, again and again, as e. g. in the biblical saying my assistant Asafa Disasa had painted on his house: "Fear of *Waqa* is the beginning of all wisdom."

They also call *Waqa* "the Unique one" (*Waqa tokicha*). As Waquma Tollera once remarked: "*Waqa* is one; man is many. *Waqa* has no equals.

He is above all things. Nothing is above Him." The idea is closely connected with the one of the Most High.

Significantly, a Catholic Oromo priest once confided to me: "The Oromo are not greatly taken by the idea of a Holy Trinity." Indeed, I am sure that there is something in this idea which conflicts with their innermost feelings in regard to *Waqa,* the unique one.

Another feature in their traditional concept of *Waqa* is that they did not see Him as a 'God of love' in the Christian sense.

> "Nowadays, it is said that *Waqa* loves us, but our fathers never said so." (Mirresa Gamtesa)
> "In former times, people did not call *Waqa* their father. True, we sometimes called ourselves his children, but this was only in order to make ourselves little in his sight." (Waquma Tollera)

From a conversation with Shagerdi Bukko:

> *Q.* "Did people ever think of *Waqa* as a grandfather?"
> *A.* "No, never."
> *Q.* "Or as a mother?"
> *A.* "No, never."
> *Q.* "Or as a father?"
> *A.* "No, never. There was no such relationship as between father and child between *Waqa* and man."

In prayers used in church – prayers often literally translated from western models – the word *'garaalafuma* – tenderness – soft-heartedness' sometimes occurs. Even my youngest assistant, Beqele Lamu, was entirely against this word being used in regard to Waqa. He did not like prayers such as "O Waqa, in your tender love for us ... etc". In this he still agreed with an old man as Waquma Tollera, who stressed Waqa's immovable serenity in this way:

> "Man can say of another man: 'His trouble moves my heart', but we cannot say: 'O *Waqa*, may my trouble move you'.
> People may be soft-hearted in their love for one another, but *Waqa* decides out of himself [*fedhasatin*]."

And Asafa Disasa:

> "When we speak of what *Waqa* does, the best we can say is that he does things *fedhasatin.* It is only of Waqa that we speak thus."

Beqele Lamu:

> "There is, however, another word you often use in your prayers. It is the word *'arjuma'* [magnanimity]. This word I like very much. I like you to pray: 'O *Waqa*, in your magnanimity, grant us ...' And I also like the name *Waqayo*. It brings *Waqa* nearer to us."

In conclusion we can say that there is a shift towards the Christian concept of a God of love, but it is indeed a very gradual one. This is clearly illustrated by the words of another Catholic Oromo priest:

> "I do not care for the God of the Europeans. He is too much of a good-natured father, a daddy. My God is still the God of my grandfather, the God of the sky and the stars and the clouds, the God of thunder and lightning."

7. Source and guardian of truth and justice

The Matcha have a word *'dhuga'* which comprises both truth and justice. *Waqa* is the guardian of both as it is clearly indicated in their oaths and in their reaction to people who transgress his laws – laws connected with the social order of which He is the source. According to them *Waqa* withdraws from those who take a false oath and from other evil-doers.

> "There was a man who took a false oath. His eldest son died soon after; his wife became a cripple and was unable to work; he himself became a beggar. I saw this happen myself."
>
> (Dinsa Sarba)

Jote, a petty ruler at the time of the Amharic conquest, who had put himself at the service of the emperor and promised to submit the other peoples of western Wollega to the latter's rule, was a man notorious for his cruelty. He roamed the country with his soldiers, promised the various peoples on oath that they would not be oppressed by the emperor and afterwards began to exploit them himself.

> "Jote broke the oaths he had sworn to those people whom he brought under the emperor's yoke and began himself to exploit and oppress them. Therefore *Waqa* withdrew from him. He was

accused of his deeds to the emperor who, as a result, removed him from office.

On one occasion, he had condemned some people to be hung. While others carried out his orders, he stood beneath a tree to watch. Among those awaiting punishment was a man who prayed thus: 'O *Waqa,* Jote is about to hang me. People now say: A day will come that *Waqa* will punish Jote for this. But I say: O *Waqa* do not delay, rescue me now. I have done no wrong.' As his turn came a light drizzle of rain fell and lightning struck the tree where Jote stood. Jote fell to the ground. 'I acquit you,' he shouted, 'go home, go home!' The man replied: 'It is not you but *Waqa* who sets me free.' Seizing Jote beneath his armpitts, some of his followers took him home." (Ambassa Waqo)

[Waqa was present in the soft drizzle as well as in the lightning.]

In everyday life the way people appeal to *Waqa* to witness to the truth is often rather disrespectful. Many times, while boys were playing cards, I heard talk like this:

A. "You were cheating."
B. "No, I was not."
A. "You were."
B. "No. *Dhuga Waqa* [truth of *Waqa*]."

Misfortune is readily seen to be a punishment meted out by *Waqa.* Thus a young boy who told me:

"Yesterday I went to the market to sell my cock, but I found no one who wanted to buy it. Then I began to think within myself. I said in my heart: 'What wrong have I done that *Waqa* does not bless me?' "

However, people are well aware that much human suffering cannot be explained this way. In such cases they say: "*Waqa* knows what is best" or "It is *Waqa's* will."

8. Waqa withdraws

Though they often speak of *Waqa* punishing man directly, their fundamental view of things is such that in these cases *Waqa* himself in

fact does nothing but rather withdraws from man. This withdrawal means already in itself that life is disminished in every form: good health, fertility, material well-being. This is the primary view they have of the matter. Another is that, as a result of *Waqa's* withdrawal, man is left a victim to minor evil powers. It is these minor powers, rather than *Waqa* himself that strike man with misfortune: for example, sickness or craziness. These minor evil powers, formerly called 'evil ayana', are nowadays referred to as evil spirits or devils (*setana*).

This view that *Waqa* reacts against evil by withdrawing from man, is expressed in the following myth, one well known in Matchaland.

> "Long, long ago, Waqa was lying very close to the earth and people could ask him whatever they needed. When he lay close to the earth there was always plenty of rain.
> Once upon a time, Waqa sent for all the animals and told them: 'You can speak freely to me and even complain about those things which cause you to suffer.'
> So the animals assembled before Waqa.
> The first one summoned by Waqa to speak was the donkey. The donkey stepped forward and said: 'O Waqa, you asked me to speak, but I have only to thank you. I have no cause to complain.'
> Then came the horse. The horse, too, behaved very respectfully towards Waqa. 'I have only thanks to offer you, Waqa,' he said, 'thanks for the grass you give me to eat, for the water you give me to drink, and for your sun that warms me.'
> All the other animals spoke in the same way.
>
> At last, it was the turn of the mule. The mule did complain. He said: 'O Waqa, you ordered me to speak up. All right, I do have a cause to complain. You are lying with your belly too close to the earth. It is raining far too much.' And while speaking in this vein, he grew more and more angry, until he actually kicked Waqa's belly.
> At that Waqa withdrew going upwards from the earth. He withdrew from all of us, but he withdrew in a special way from the mule: from that day onwards the mule was unable to produce young."

Whenever they told me this story, people seemed to assume that the mule's behaviour was also the reason why Waqa retired from man.

They would add, for example: "That is why our prayers are no longer heard by Waqa as they were in the beginning of time." Or they would quote a saying common among them: "Long ago Waqa was just behind our house, now he is at the other side of the river."

Waquma Tollera gave the following comment on the story:

> "The mule kicked Waqa and he withdrew from the earth. So it was Waqa cursed the mule, saying: 'From now on, you will no longer produce young.' Because sin increased, Waqa went up, away from man. Is it not just because of this that there are many diseases?"

But they often smiled, while telling the story, as if they found it silly. Why should Waqa withdraw from man because of a mule's foolish behaviour?

However, they have no similar myth about an act of rebellion by man against Waqa at the beginning of time. The gap in their own tradition was readily filled by the biblical story of man's fall in the paradise where Waqa also walked in the cool of the evening and man could speak with him.

In a conversation with my assistants Shagerdi Bukko put it in this way:

> "In the beginning Waqa was close to man and, although they could not see him, people could hear his voice and talk to him. As people had more and more children, sin, too, increased and Waqa withdrew still further from them.
> There is a story about a mule that kicked Waqa. And Waqa said to the mule: 'Be barren for ever.'
> Sin causes Waqa to withdraw, my sons.
> If someone is evil, do you consort with him or do you keep out of his way?
>
> *AA.* We keep away from him.
> *SB.* So you see for yourselves: we do as *Waqa* does.
> *AA.* So it is because of *Waqa's* withdrawal that evil things happen to us?
> *SB.* Of course. When the herdsman leaves his goats, then it is that the leopard comes and catches them. The same happens to us: *Waqa* withdraws and the devil catches us. That is why there are diseases against which we have no medicine. But if

we live well, if our deeds are good, *Waqa* will keep evil powers far from us."

In the Matcha's view such a silent and dignified withdrawal by *Waqa* answers most to his nature as the Most High. It is also in their eyes the most appropriate reaction against what they call *'tchubbu* – sin'. Indeed, to them sin is first of all and fundamentally an act by which man takes his fate in his own hands, thus denying his total dependence on *Waqa.* In addition, he fails to respect *Waqa's* creation, the world-order at large and their own social order which is seen to be part of this whole. They frequently describe sin as 'transgressing the boundary set to man by *Waqa'*, an expression which refers directly to the social order given them by *Waqa.*

Their idea of *Waqa's* dignified reaction to sin is reflected in what they expected from the ritual leader of their *gada,* whose position closely resembled that of a priest. He was expected to attend all their meetings but without partaking in them; he would sit somewhat apart with his scepter in his hand and wrapped in a wide blanket woven in the ancient ritual colours of white, black and red, "and while he was sitting this way, we children would creep under his blanket when it was raining". He did not even take part in peace negotiations, but only said, again and again: "*Nagaa, nagaa* – Peace peace." If the meeting got out of control and degenerated into heated debate, he sometimes would rise up and retire a little without saying a word.

My own experience as a priest confirms this. People were invariably disappointed and at a loss, when I showed anger. Once a young boy challenged me on such an occasion: "Father, you should not grow angry." Indeed, they simply do not expect their priest to do so. They expect him to be uncompromising in proclaiming *Waqa's* law, in insisting on truth, justice and peace, but always without losing his temper, and to be permanently disposed to understand and to forgive, to reconcile and to re-establish good relations with them. Since he is a source of life and blessing for them, they appreciate a certain familiarity with him in social intercourse (much as they wish *Waqa* to remain near them) but at the same time he should behave in a dignified way and keep his distance. Even as the former holder of the scepter could not personally take part in peace negotiations but left this all to the people, his part being only to give general exhortations, so the priest has to keep at distance from the ordinary disputes in such negotiations.

9. Some other features of the Matcha's attitude with regard to Waqa

It strikes the eye, again and again, that the Matcha in the ordinary way do not display much respect for their own leaders. They like to show that they wish to be independent from them. But this does not mean that they are not fully aware of the fact that they need them. As soon as things are seen to be out of control, they turn to their leaders again in great earnestness. Though there are, of course, some differences, we see a similar attitude towards *Waqa*. From what has been said until now it has become clear that their attitude towards him is not only inspired by awe but also marked by familiarity and even, from time to time, by lack of respect. In his despair a man may exclaim: "*Waqa* does not exist!" But the normal way to complain against *Waqa* is interrogative. "O *Waqa*, why do you do this to me?" – "O *Waqa*, will you not have mercy on me?" – "O *Waqa*, what must I do that you may have mercy on me again?" – "O *Waqa*, what wrong have we done that you do not give rain to your little black ants?"

At the same time we note in them a clear tendency to pietism. A fine story about *Waqa* easily moves them to tears. Instead of saying: "O *Waqa*", they sometimes say: "O my *Waqa.*" When they see in someone's hair or on his skin a little spot of another colour, they will say smiling: "*Waqayo* has kissed you there."

For the sake of completeness we mention here that people sometimes also speak of *'Waqa dima* – the light-coloured Waqa (or 'the red Waqa')' in contrast to *'Waqa guracha* – the dark-coloured Waqa'.

> "We have a saying: '*Nama ija adi sodaddhen, Waqa ija dima afan bua?* – Do you think that being afraid already of the white [not angry] eyes of man. I would defy the red [angry] eyes of *Waqa*?' 'Red eyes' are associated with anger. When speaking thus of *Waqa*, we also think of the lightning as a token of *Waqa's* anger in a dark sky. But the lightning only flashes and the dark sky remains as it is. *Waqa* frightens man with his lightning, but he himself always remains 'The dark *Waqa* whose inside is white'. When we say 'white' we think of something pure, undisturbed. We know that the real *Waqa* is like this." (Gammachu Magarsa)

Chapter 12

WAQA AND THE EARTH

We have already come across the Matcha's idea that, long ago, Waqa was laying close to the earth, fertilizing it with his rain. The image comes close to that of a human couple. In spite of this, the expression 'The earth is Waqa's wife – *Lafa niti Waqa'* as Haberland noticed it with the more eastern Arsi Oromo (1963:607) is not common with the western Matcha, at least not nowadays, though a woman whose husband died may still say: "I am like the earth without rain now."

People still do see, indeed, a close connection between Waqa and the earth. It comes to the fore in their blessings, oaths, curses, and rituals.

1. Blessings

May Waqa and the earth help you.
May Waqa and the earth cause you to grow up (a blessing for children).
May Waqa be good for you from above and the earth from beneath. (rain – crops)
Be blessed by Waqa and the earth.

2. Curses

Be not blessed either by Waqa or the earth.
May Waqa and the earth burn [make dry] your kidneys and your womb (the curse is addressed to a woman).

3. Oaths

The man who takes the oath breaks a dry stick, saying:
"May the earth on which I walk and Waqa beneath whom I walk do the same to me, if I have done such and such a thing."

4. Rituals

In conlusion of the proclamation of their *saffu*, the law given to them by Waqa from the very beginning, the dialogue between the two ritual leaders is concluded as follows:

A. "Where does this saffu come from, my friend?"
B. "It comes from Waqa and the earth."

"When we were drinking coffee or beer, my father or mother, would first take a mouthful of beer or coffee and spit it out in the direction of the door, and in the direction of the light. They would do this two times, saying: 'O Waqa take this. O earth take this.' "

(Gammachu Magarsa)

And these prayers in the course of a ritual:

"O Waqa have mercy on us.
O earth, have mercy on us.
O Waqa, give us rain.
O Waqa, make the earth have mercy on us."

[Waqa's pre-eminence comes clearly to the fore here.]

While Waqa is usually invoked without the earth being mentioned, the latter is seldom invoked without reference to Waqa. The earth needs Waqa's rain to produce grass for the cattle and crops for people. But the combination Waqa–earth is not always as close as in the examples given above; on occasion there are two separate rituals at the same time, one for Waqa and the other for the earth. On such occasions people will slaughter a bull or sheep for Waqa and make libations under a tree for the earth (*dibayu*).

At such rituals the earth is invoked separately:

"What we produced on you, o earth, (children, cattle, crops), bless it for us.
What we sowed in you, o earth, make it sprout well.
Give peace to people."

Once I witnessed a *dibayu* ritual on the occasion of people beginning to cultivate new land. While the young ones were ploughing and clearing, some older men slaughtered a black sheep (Waqa's colour). The sheep's blood was sprinkled on the earth and smeared on the one tree which would not be cut (they wished to use it again for a similar sacrifice later). While the blood was given to the earth, the meat of the sheep (pieces taken from all parts of its body, symbolizing the whole sheep) was burned in a fire made of fragrant branches. During this cer-

emony, the men retired a little way from the fire 'That Waqa might come down and smell the meat'.

Sometimes the ritual is for the earth alone:

An old man:

> "I asked a prophet [*raji*] what I should do. He told me: 'Every time you plough, take some beer in a little calabash and pour it out in the earth as soon as you have opened it. If you do this, your harvest will be good.' All my life I have done as he told me, and my harvest has always been good."

5. Some sayings

The earth is often compared with a mother.

> "When you are walking up a hill, the earth is like a mother to you. When you are walking down she is like a step-mother."

They mean here that, if you fall as you go upwards, the earth catches you in her arms as a good mother does, and you will not hurt yourself much. But if you fall while going down, the earth recedes and causes you to hurt yourself badly.

Referring to Waqa's withdrawing from man, when he sins, they will also say:

> "Waqa is like a father who goes away. Earth is like a mother: she is always with us."

They have a nice song for the earth:

Daáche yaá 'ddha márga,	O earth, mother of the grass,
jéliké bisháani,	under you is water,
ĭrriké midháani,	on top of you is grain,
Qónne sĭrra nyáanne,	We plough and eat on you,
hórre sĭrra yáafne.	we produce cattle and lead it out to the pasture on you.
Offĭraat nú baaddhú;	Carry us on your back;
nagáake nú laaddhú.	give us your peace.

They do also say:

> "We are born from the womb of our mother;
> we are buried in the womb of the earth."

As it will become even clearer in the following chapter, the earth has a special and exclusive place in the Matcha's concept of the superhuman. But whatever relationship they trace between Waqa and the earth, Waqa remains in his unique pre-eminent place in their concept of the superhuman.

Remark

E. Haberland writes with regard to the Oromo at large: "Originally Heaven and Earth were standing one next to the other on equal terms." (1963:563) In other words the pre-eminence of Waqa is something of later times. This opinion (he may well be right) is in accordance with a wider concept of his in regard to possible influences on the Oromo by other cultures.

Chapter 13

AYANA

"Everything has a twofold nature: one part we see with our eyes, the other part we do not see with our eyes but by our hearts. This invisible part of them we call *'ayana'*. You will never understand us unless you realize that we see everything in this way."
(Gammachu Magarsa)

1. Some statements regarding ayana

Every creature, people, animals and plants, have their own *ayana.* If I slaughter an ox and he kicks me, I say: "His *ayana* has hurt me." Every wild buffalo has his own *ayana* and his clan, too, as a whole has its *ayana.* Everyone is afraid of the *ayana* of a buffalo. After I had killed my buffalo, the first thing I did was to put my gun against his head. The iron of the gun is strong. I made him feel that I was stronger than he. His *ayana* was still in him, you know. It's only after this that we cut his throat.
Mountains, too, have their *ayana.* There are still people who pray to the *ayana* of the Dimbo mountain.
Every river has its own *ayana,* to whom people make offerings of cocks.
The earth herself is not an *ayana,* but every stretch of land has its own *ayana.* Such an *ayana* is called 'Abdari'. My father's land around our house has its own *ayana.* We call this land *'arada'*, and so we pray: "O *ayana* of my father's *arada,* give us peace."
If a child dies through drinking too much *araqi* [home-made alcoholic drink] his parents will say: "The *araqi's ayana* does not like us," and from then onwards they will abstain from drinking it.
Every man has an *ayana* who guides and guards him. If you kill a man, you must make peace with his *ayana.*

One of my assistants in a letter to me:

Thanks to your *ayana,* Father, I have no worries. [A European would have written: "Thanks to the care you have shown me."]

And another assistant:

> Mountains and trees, days, months and seasons, every man and his lineage – all have their own *ayana.* These *ayana* rule our lives; they make us what we are. But I cannot explain to you exactly what an *ayana* is.

One thing is clear from these examples: *ayana* are conceived of as *beings.*

2. *"An ayana is something of Waqa"*

a. Prayers

In many prayers Waqa and *ayana* are invoked in one breath:

> "O Waqa, o *ayana* of my father, give me peace."
> "O Waqa, o *ayana* of Friday, have mercy on us."
> [a prayer said at a sacrifice on Friday]
> "O Waqa, o my own *ayana,* restore my child to health for me."

b. Rituals

At a sacrifice for Waqa people say when a gust of wind passes over them: "Waqa has come down to smell our sacrifice." At a sacrifice for an *ayana*, they will say the same.

For both a sacrifice for Waqa and a sacrifice for an *ayana*, people must abstain from sexual intercourse the previous night.

For both Waqa and an *ayana* the sacrificial animal must be of a single colour, a symbol of purity and perfection.

An old woman:

> "Nowadays [that is, since we have become Christians] some people say that, in former times, we adored a tree when we prayed and poured out our libations at its foot. But this is not true: we prayed to its *ayana,* we prayed to Waqa."

c. A distinction

The Matcha took over a belief from the aboriginal peoples that every kind of game had its own guardian spirit, its 'king', who was thought

to reside in the biggest specimen of the group. He was called 'Tchato' (a non-Oromo name). An old hunter said of him:

> "The tchato of the buffaloes is not an *ayana.* He has no *waqumma* [divinity] he is not something of Waqa."

3. *"Ayana are Waqa but Waqa is not ayana"*

a. Statements

From an interview between Shagerdi Bukko and my assistants:

Q. "Can we say: Waqa is like a tree and the *ayana* are its branches?"
A. "No we do not say that."
Q. "Do people ever say: Waqa is like a father and the *ayana* are his children?"
A. "No, never."
Q. "Can we say: O *ayana* of my father, you created me?"
A. "No, we cannot say that. We say: O Waqa, you have created me. Waqa alone creates."
Q. "So Waqa and *ayana* are not the same?"
A. "*Ayana* are Waqa but Waqa is not *ayana.*"

Waquma Tollera offers this view:

> "The *ayana* come down on people Waqa has created. The *ayana* come down on people, but Waqa rules over the *ayana.* Therefore, we pray: "O Waqa, make my father's *ayana* have mercy on my child."

b. Ritual

> "When we bring a sacrifice to Waqa, we throw raw meat in the fire that the smell of it may go up to Waqa, but we do not do this for the *ayana*. Waqa and *ayana* are not the same."
>
> (Shagerdi Bukko)

> "When we offer meat to the *ayana* of our deceased father, we throw some of the meat to the birds of prey. When the birds come and take the meat, we say: 'Our father's *ayana* has taken

it.' This we do only for the *ayana.* What we slaughter for Waqa, is burned in the fire; what we slaughter for the *ayana* is given to the birds."

(Ayelle Tura)

Despite this uncompromising statement, however, people will sometimes withdraw a little way at a sacrifice for an *ayana* and wait for a puff of wind to come as a token that Waqa has accepted their sacrifice. Both views of the matter, *'Ayana* are something of Waqa' and 'Waqa is not *ayana'* are reflected in their sacrificial rites.

On the other hand, there is also a difference between Waqa's and an *ayana's* presence in the wind. Waqa is only imagined to be present in a breath of wind, while the *ayana* are also thought to be present in a whirlwind. They call such whirlwinds 'an *ayana's* dance' (cf. Knutsson 1967:73).

An old hunter:

"After we killed the elephant, we did not go at once to the place where he had fallen. A whirlwind rose behind us at that very moment. *'Yuyuyuyuu'*, it said and it threw the ashes up from the grass that was burned the day before. The ashes stood upright like a stick. The whirlwind began to turn around the elephant roaring. *'Yuyuyuyuu'*, it said [the normal cry of alarm and also of pain when somebody is beaten]. It was the elephant's *ayana* who was crying this way. We were very afraid that the whirlwind would attack us, but it went away towards a tree where the elephant had previously stood rubbing himself."

However the crucial difference is that Waqa is invoked by everyone universally since he is concerned with all, while an *ayana*, linked as it is to a particular person, animal or plant, is only invoked and feared by those who are linked to it either by nature or free choice.

4. A child and his ayana

"Every child is given his own *ayana* by Waqa. This *ayana* is already with him before he is born. It is his own personal *ayana,* not that of his father or mother. People say that this *ayana* dwells under the spot on his head where the skin palpitates. They never will touch that spot; it is the seat of his *ayana* who protects him.

For as long as the child is unable to speak the name of Waqa, the *ayana* often shows himself to the child.
When a child is babbling in his sleep, people say: He is talking with his *ayana,* and when he laughs in his sleep they say: His *ayana* is playing with him."

(Asafa's father and Waquma Tollera)

"As soon as the child is born, his *ayana* shows him all things of his future. He also shows him the spot where he will be buried; the child then smells the earth of his grave. That's why he starts crying as soon as he is born. But afterwards he does not remember anything of what the *ayana* has showed to him."

(Mirresa Gamtesa)

"In former times, when a man had begotten a son, he would go to a prophet [*raji*] who sees things hidden from other people, or to a man who understood the stars [*ayantu*]. Such a man would tell him: Your son has the *ayana* of a killer: give him a shield, or he would say: Your son has the *ayana* of a farmer: he will always have good harvests.
People still say: I have the *ayana* of a farmer, of a teacher or of a killer of big game. A man who has a killer's *ayana* will never grow rich by farming [he neglects his fields]. A person's *ayana* remains with him for all his life."

(Mirresa Gamtesa)

5. My father's and my mother's ayana

"We pray to the *ayana* of our father and mother. We often say: O *ayana* of my father! or O *ayana* of my mother! [These are common exclamations] But these *ayana* can also punish us, if we are doing wrong. If a mother is spoiling one of her children at the cost of the others her *ayana* may withdraw from the child and then some sickness will befall him.
When my brother has killed somebody and I eat with him, my father's *ayana* grows very angry with me.

[According to Matcha law, a man who has killed another man is forbidden to eat with other people, until he has performed a ritual by which he 'washes the blood from his hands'.]

People also say: May the *ayana* of your father help you, or, May your mother's *ayana* help you.
Harme Dano [an old woman] once spat into my hands, saying: I have eaten and drunk from your father's and mother's hands: may their *ayana* help you.
In former times, a man would bring a sacrifice for his deceased father's *ayana,* when misfortune had struck his house.
Some people would need more from their father's *ayana* than others; they both asked and gave them more in that they sacrificed to them every year.
Nowadays, people have left this custom out of respect for the Church, but not out of lack of respect for their father's and mother's *ayana."* (Mirresa Gamtesa, Ensermu Waquma)

"Once my mother had some new clothes and she gave them to my brothers and sisters, not to me, since I had still good clothes myself. But nevertheless I, too, wanted new clothes. At that my mother said to me: My son, I have no money left. May my *ayana* clothe you."

(Gammachu Magarsa)

6. Other sayings about the ayana

One of my assistants: "People still say if they have no son: 'My *ayana* did not give me a son.' And if a woman is barren, people still say of her: 'It is her *ayana.*' "

An old man I knew well told his son (and rightly so): "My *ayana* is such that he makes me a man who is normally soft-hearted, but who, sometimes, can grow very, very angry."

After marriage negotiations have been brought to a successful conclusion, the go-betweens may say, pointing at the boy and the girl: "Their *ayana* have knotted their hairs together from the very beginning."

Of a person who is lucky people use to say: "He has *ayana."* The expression, however, cannot simply be translated by 'He is fortunate'. People never see a person's good fortune as wholly detached from his *ayana.* To the Matcha mere chance and mischance do not exist.

They also say that a person's *ayana* is good, when he has been blessed by Waqa – blessed in children, cattle and good harvests, blessed with the gift of peace-making and with a respected place in society. It

is such persons who were preferably asked to act as leaders at a ritual, since they were regarded as being closer to Waqa.

Finally one more quotation deserves a place here. It is taken from Knutsson's book, but was confirmed by my assistants. Pointing to the relationship between Waqa and *ayana*, one of his informants said:

> "The government is one. The Emperor is one and the same, but governors and officials are many. Yet they belong to the government, and for us they are the government." (1967:80).

7. Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing that the concept of *ayana* comprises more than just the idea of a superhuman power dwelling in a person, an animal or plant. It may also point to the result of this power's activity: to that person's individual character or his fate. It also can have the connotation of guardian spirit, a spirit who protects and guides.

It is 'something of Waqa' in a person, an animal or plant making them the way they are: a particular manifestation of the divine, of Waqa as creator and as source of all life. As a catholic Oromo priest explained it: "*Ayana* is Waqa in a particular way."

In addition it confirms in a new way that the word 'Waqa' cannot simply be translated 'God' as this word is understood in English; it comprises considerably more. "Waqa is one, but the ayana, too, are Waqa in a way. It is therefore that I do not like it when you call the ayana superhuman. Are they merely superhuman? They are much more: they are something of Waqa. It is in the many, many ayana that Waqa himself comes close to us and that we are united to him.*

Therefore, birds, too, are only imperfect images of the ayana. They are allowed to move in two worlds, heaven and earth, but you cannot say that, because of this, they show us what an ayana really is. We rather should say that they help us to talk about ayana and to pray to them. You can call the birds 'links between heaven and earth', but you cannot call the ayana merely 'links' between Waqa and this world. When you give me your hand, do I call your hand 'a link' between you and me? No, your hand is you yourself in a way. If I kiss your hand, I kiss you, and if I pray to my father's ayana, I pray Waqa.

* Cf. Knutsson (1967:53): "It is the form of ... the various ayanas that Divinity and the quality of waka come really close to Man and his world."

For all this, no Oromo will ever say 'Waqa is ayana', no more than I will ever say that you yourself and your hand are one and the same thing. Even less we will ever say that 'man is something of Waqa', because Waqa's ayana is in us. Waqa is Waqa, and man is man.

To tell you the full truth – can I do so? O, my tongue grows heavy now – to tell you the full truth: we see the ayana as flowing out of Waqa in a way, filling the whole of creation, filling every creature whose ayana they are, making them the way they are, both inside and outside. But the ayana remain invisible to human eyes. What is visible in man is not his ayana. This visible aspect of man is rather formed and conditioned by his ayana: his ayana manifests itself in it."

(Gammachu Magarsa)

Note

In this chapter hardly any reference has been made to the ayana of descent groups and other social groupings. The Matcha's idea regarding these groups and their mutual relations is indissolubly tied up with their understanding of the characteristics and the mutual relations between these groups' ayana. We will come back to this point.

Chapter 14

EVIL AYANA AND DEVILS

1. 'Evil ayana'

To explain all kinds of human suffering and misfortune Matcha were used in former times to speak of 'evil *ayana' (ayana hamaa)*. These evil ayana were seen as superhuman beings but quite different from the true *ayana* spoken of in the previous chapter.

In contrast to the latter, these evil ayana were never referred to as 'something of Waqa', but rather seen as amoral beings, acting only in regard to people from whom Waqa had withdrawn. Seen in this light their name 'evil ayana' harboured a contradiction. Its use was only explicable in so far as these evil powers were considered to be superhuman in a way. People themselves are well aware of the contradiction in terms. While speaking about the matter, an old Oromo, well acquainted with the world of ayana, was asked by my assistant: "Are there good and evil ayana?" His answer: "No, there is nothing evil in ayana; all ayana are good."

2. Devils

It is the Muslims and especially the Christians who provided the Matcha with a new concept of superhuman evil powers: the devils (*setana*).

> "The *setana* came into our country with Christianity. Before there were no *setana* in our country, believe me."
>
> (An old man)

These devils, unlike the traditional ayana, were somehow independent spirits, enemies of Waqa and man. As they absorbed this concept, the Matcha were provided with a much more acceptable explanation for all kinds of evil in the world. As a result, the name 'evil ayana' is scarcely heard nowadays. People rather speak of 'devils'.

Once a boy having done something wrong excused himself to me by saying: "At that moment, Father, the *setana* jumped on my back." All sicknesses have become devils. It has become quite usual for people to come to the priest saying: "Father, my sister has a devil." They do not mean then that their sister is possessed by a devil who has bereaved her from her common sense, but simply that she is sick. When

Shagerdi Bukko, to illustrate a situation arising when Waqa had withdrawn from man, said: "When the herdsman retires, the leopard catches the goats", he had just such devils in mind.

3. Possession

These evil spirits (and people, nowadays, include with them all kind of spirits who entered their society through non Oromo peoples whose daughters the Matcha married) may also possess people. Such cases of "possession" with all their frightening and unexplained effects, are quite common nowadays, and people frequently have recourse to the priests to expel these devils.

When speaking of such cases of possession, people use the words: "A devil has *jumped* on him (her)," in contrast to the ayana of whom they say that they *come down* on man. Devils are of this earth and act on their own account. Ayana descend from above; they come from Waqa.

"Ayana never possess (jump on) people," as they will say.

4. Waqa and the devils

As a result Waqa has been invested with a new quality: He has become the enemy of devils whom he can defeat at any time. A customary prayer, heard at the present day, is: "O Waqa, keep the devils away from us." Mirresa Gamtesa once told me:

> "Yesterday I was talking with my mother. She said: 'Why would Waqa send his lightning down to us? As he looks at the earth the devil puts his tongue out at him. This makes Waqa grow angry. The devil laughs at Waqa and Waqa replies by thundering.' I laughed when my mother told me this. There are trees which are often struck by lightning. People will say that this is so because the devil is sitting beneath those trees."

Evidently the understanding of Waqa as the Most High, too great to be moved in any way by lower beings is not always raised by this modern confrontation with the setana.

5. Good and evil ayana — a last glance back

The existence of evil in this world remains also to the Matcha ultimately a mystery. To them, too, there is simply no answer that satisfies the human mind. The replacing of their former 'evil *ayana*' by dev-

ils is not an answer, and the more reflective among them are well aware of this. But it has helped them to preserve the word *'ayana'* for those beings who are certainly 'something of Waqa'. Belief in these beings still pervades their view of man and his world.

Sad to say, the good effects of this purified use of the word ayana were practically brought to nought by the negative attitude of most Christian pastors and priests, especially those of the Ethiopian Church, who inveighed against all ayana indiscriminately. Those among my Catholic colleagues whom I knew were more cautious in their approach and more anxious to understand, were not perceived as such by the people at large and were lumped together with the others.[22]

Mirresa Gamtesa is a good example of the resultant confusion. Like the older people he still spoke very positively about *ayana,* but he doubted at times. Once he remarked casually: "Nowadays, people believe all *ayana* are devils, because the priests say so."

For themselves most Matcha are not given to much speculation in this matter. It is noteworthy, however, that their answers to this question are markedly different from those of western peoples. The western concept of the universe as a unified system of causes which acts according to constant laws and fixed principles – a thing westerners call 'nature' – is entirely alien to them. Whatever happens in the world and transcends human activity and power, is seen as an effect of the operations of superhuman beings, first of all Waqa and then lesser spirits such as the real *ayana* or the modern devils. The whole universe is personalized. What westerners call somewhat loosely 'the course of nature', to them exhibits the unpredictability and changeableness inherent to personal beings. Ultimately, all these powers can be influenced directly or indirectly by man. Man's conflicts with the real *ayana* are seen as the effect of his conflict with the supreme will of Waqa; their benevolence is seen to be an effect of Waqa's blessing.

The specifically Oromo element in this view of things is that this personal element in things is not perceived as something independent but as 'something of Waqa', at least when the real *ayana* are concerned.

They share this view with the Nuer and Dinka, as illustrated in the book of Evans-Pritchard and G. Lienhardt. Referring to these books M. Wilson rightly states: "There can be not question that the idea of

[22] One of them once confided to me: "What can I do? I would like to know more about the people's way of thinking and of their customs, so that I could understand and appreciate them more fully. But you see for yourself how absorbed we are by other work, and, in addition, we lack the know-how for the research needed."

God was traditionally much further developed among the Nuer and Dinka of the Sudan than it was further south, that among them divinity was conceived as one, though it had many manifestations..."[23]

Remark

It excedes the scope of this book to deal extensively with devils and cases of possession. With regard to the latter we must distinguish between possession as it occurs among people and that of the so-called *qallu*.

Qallu are pagan ritual experts who made their appearance on the scene as a reaction to Christianity. To enforce their position they adopted certain Christian elements into their cult. Karl Eric Knutsson has dealt with them extensively in his book 'AUTHORITY AND CHANGE – A Study of the Kallu Institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia' (1967).

Each *qallu* has several ayana who possess him at regular times and who, through the mouth of the qallu inform the people about the causes of their misfortunes. Among these ayana we also find Maram, a female 'divinity' who has special significance for women in regard to fertility. Traditionally this Maram is an exclusive women's 'divinity' and men can not pray to her. (See the next chapter)

So, as the ayana of a male qallu, she constitutes a new phenomenon in Matcha society. Knutsson deals mainly with so-called clan-qallu, whose activities are limited in principle to their own clan. He distinguishes these more respectable ritual experts from the *qallicha*, a more asocial type of such experts.

In my area there were no clan-qallu for the last decades. Two ritual experts who exerted a strong influence around Dembidollo, Abba Irenna and Abba Saba, were unrelated to the local clans, and rather qallicha. When I started my research they were dead already. They had no successors, mainly owing to the increased influence of the missions.

Until recently people still used to have recourse to some well-known *qallu* or *qallicha* at a considerable distance from the town, when the few minor *qallicha* who remained in the area had proved unsuccessful.

[23] Evans-Pritchard, 1956, pp. 272 ff, 280–282; Lienhardt, 1961, p. 153; Wilson, 1971, p. 33.

Chapter 15

MARAM

Maram is the 'divinity' of motherhood. She is invoked and addressed in song by the women at any birth-ritual. Another ritual at which she is invoked is the one called 'Atete' which, in former times, was performed by every woman in a neighbourhood who wished to be pregnant. At both rituals, similar songs are sung.

Here follow some of these songs, recorded after the birth of a child – songs which express very well the women's intimate relationship with Maram. They are sung by the neighbourwomen on the third, fifth and ninth day after the child is born.

While the mother is lying in the backroom, and one or two women prepare the 'porridge of birth-giving', the others remain in the front-room. They are sitting in a circle on the ground, a cowhide on their knees, – the hide of a fertile cow – which they beat with their hands as if it were a drum.

As with most Matcha songs there is a chorus and an endless number of stanzas, sung by two or three soloists. After every stanza the soloist ends with the chorus, which is then repeated by the whole group.

Chorus:	
Atomá harró Marámi;[24]	Today Maram gives us her peace;
má mukófna?	why shouldn't we rejoice together?
1. Yaá Maraḿ, yaa Máramĭ,	O Maram, o Maram,
wálaláf arárami.	forgive the sins we committed unknowingly.
Yaá Maraḿ, yaa kúlekó,	O Maram with beautiful eyes,
kóttu, tái fúlekó.	come, sit down in front of me.
	[Have mercy: keep my child alive and healthy. Beautiful: the connotation is 'a beautiful setting'.]

[24] Matcha have a highly developed poetical technique which includes metre an rhyme as well as perfect vowel symmetry in two or more verses. The technique is only imaginable in a sonorous language such as Oromo (cf. Littmann, 1925:25). The vowel symmetry is easily to be seen. The accents are indicated to give an idea of the rhythm.

Chorus

2. Tchĭninsú afaá butú,
When in pain, you clutched at the grass,

mĭtu dágalé butú,
while in labour you clutched at the wall,

dáanĭ mutchá butú.
you gave birth, now you have a child.

Iddo mĭtu kéti
In return of your pain

gúdden kún kan kéti.
the baby is yours.

[The woman is lying on a cowhide under which grass has been spread.]

Chorus

3. Yáa desú wallú kobé,
O mother, your clothes smell bad,

Máramtú borró gonfé;
but Maram adorned your back-room;

dhĭrsatú balbál kolfé.
your husband laughs with open mouth.

Yáa dhabdú wallú mojó,
O woman without child, your clothes are nice,

dhĭrsatú hingúngumé;
but your husband grumbles;

Máramtú borró sokké.
Maram avoided your backroom.

Chorus

4. Utu Bálesĭn taé,
If I were Balas,

Bálasĭ Bongá taé,
Balas of Bonga,

dhábadháf mirgá kenné;
I would give to a non killer his trophies;

ĭttin hádorsĭfatú.
Let him boast with them.

[Balas: guardian spirit of the wilderness. Bonga: area in the wilderness. Trophies: tail and head of the buffalo he killed.]

Chorus

5. Utu án Marám taé,
If I were Maram,

Máramĭ giftĭ taé,
Maram our great lady,

dhábdudháf ilmá kenné;
I would give a son to the childless woman;

dhĭrsan hádorsĭfatú.
Let him be her boast before her husband.

Chorus

6. Yáa Marám, y Máramlé,	O Maram, my dear Maram,
dhábdudháf arára mé.	have pity on the childless woman.
Yáa Marám godétikó,	O Maram, displaying to us your beauty,
yáa dhigá tollétikó,	full of sympathy for us, women,
yáa Marám marmártuko,	o Maram you are between me and Waqa,
yáa hiká gargártukó.	my helper when giving birth.
	[Maram has a special beauty, a beauty all her own which has nothing to do with feminine attractiveness towards the opposite sex. Her beauty is reserved for women.]

Chorus

7.Ayolé wallí lamá:	There are two mothers:
tóko 'shé tcharí gamá,	One is far away and everywhere,
tóko 'shé assí kaná.	the other is here.
	[The first one is Maram.]

Chorus

It is very evident in these songs that Maram is seen to be everywhere, going from house to house to help the mothers to deliver their children. The following will help us to acquire a more complete idea of what she is seen to be.

> "Maram is not Waqa. She does not create the child in the woman's womb. So women also pray to Waqa for the gift of children. However, after Waqa has given the child, everything is in Maram's hands. It is Maram who helps and sustains the mother during the months of her pregnancy, who keeps the child healthy in her womb and who assists her in childbirth. Her help is essential for any child to be safely born.
> So if we say: 'O Maram, give a child to the childless woman', we do not mean that Maram creates the child.
> Maram is virgin and, at the same time, the mother of all mothers. People never refer to her as a married woman (*dubarti*). They never speak of sex in connection with Maram.
> We feel that Waqa approves of Maram and that he trusts her and leaves everything to her. Because of this, we never pray: 'O Waqa, make Maram have pity on our child.'

Maram can ask Waqa whatever she wants.
Women are happy to have Maram as their mother, a mother with whom they share the secrets of motherhood: menstruation, pregnancy, diseases which prevent them from bearing healthy children (thus leaving them childless), and particularly the pains of labour. They consider her to be someone exclusively their own. Men have nothing to do with Maram.
Maram surpasses all ayana. She is not, however, to be seen as a lesser Waqa or a kind of 'female Waqa'. She is Maram."

(Gammachu Magarsa)

Like the earth Maram has an independent position in the Matcha's world of the superhuman. Unlike the earth, however, she is exclusively the women's 'divinity'.

"Men cannot pray to her. They can only ask the women to pray to her on their behalf." (Shagerdi Bukko)

And this, indeed, they do.
A man can approach women who are performing a ritual of their own and ask them: "Please, pray Maram for me that she may free me of this sickness." Generally, he will ask this if he thinks that the sickness in question prevents him from having children.

More frequently he will ask them to pray that he may kill a buffalo. Killing, he believes, will make him more of a man and increase his generative capacity.

This belief also accounts for the fact that women and girls will often pray to Maram that she may give a buffalo to the man who has not yet killed. The girls will sing such imprecatory songs at the feasts in honour of successful killers of big game; the women often do so in their birthsongs.

The following stanza is taken from a birthsong.

Odoshá gofá kaú	The weak horse, when it goes out,
sárren ágarté latá?	did the dogs see it or not?
ágarté nyaaté latá?	Did they eat it then or not?
Dhábdu 'shé mutcháf boú,	The childless woman who weeps for a child,
yélalá fayáf boú,	the one who is sick for a long time and longs for good health [that she may bear],

ádemsá mirgá boú,	and the hunter who longs for trophies,
Máren ágarté latá	did Maram see them?
ágarté latéf latá?	Did she give them what they long for?

Apart from an occasional request to pray for them, men have to keep aloof from the women's rituals in honour of Maram. So, for instance, even when they are sitting in the next room (sometimes even in the same one) men cannot share the ritual porridge made by the women on such occasions. Not even the smallest boy gets a morsel of it, nor was I, a honoured guest, even given a taste of it. It is not an exaggeration to say that Matcha women have built up a religious world all their own. As well as the Maram rituals they have a number of others from which men are excluded. Their very social position in Matcha society has given rise to this.

The women's social position

In former times, the major descent groups (the clans) and their minor subdivisions (the lineages) were more localized than they are nowadays. According to the Matcha's rules of exogamy, a girl had to marry outside her lineage; she had to go to 'another country' as the saying goes. This 'country' and, more particularly, her husband's family were strange to her.

In her new little world she had to work from the start to gain a respected place. The immediately obvious way to do this was to present her husband with sons. If she proved barren or if she failed repeatedly to deliver a live child, she was deprived of respect and encountered other troubles as well. Her marital relations would suffer; her husband would almost certainly take a second wife; and, since ties of consanguinity are more highly regarded than affinal ones, she would find herself isolated in a social environment usually including only a few women of her own lineage, without being able to establish for herself the much stronger and deeper blood ties existing between mother and child.

The honour of a man was bound up in his having killed either enemies or big game, that of a woman in giving life. It was for the sake of the honour of maternity that she braved her husband's strange country and that she undertook the troubles of married life and childbirth – in the same way that a hunter, for the sake of honour, braved the perils of the wilderness and a warrior the perils of battle.

Further, by the very fact that they are of other lineages, women also have different *ayana* from men. They have not only their own personal *ayana* but also a lineage *ayana* of their own. These two *ayana* the men never invoke, nor do women ever invoke the *ayana* of their husband or his lineage's *ayana.* So the women's links with Waqa (with life and fertility) are different from the men's.

Finally, mutual independence is encouraged by the men's attitude that they should not show much interest in what their women are doing among themselves. To participate in those exclusively women's rituals or even show interest in them would make them to be women.

Note

In the foregoing we mentioned the Atete ritual, a ritual performed by the women of a neighbourhood whenever one of them wishes to be pregnant again.

While speaking of this ritual, Knutsson identifies the name 'Atete' with Maram. With regard to the western Matcha this would not be correct. To them 'Atete' is the name of the ritual in which Maram is invoked. Paul T.W. Baxter states the same for the Arsi Oromo.[25]

[25] Cf. Knutsson, 1967:55. P.T.W. Baxter, 1979.

PART THREE

SOCIAL STRATA IN MATCHA SOCIETY

Chapter 16

THE BORANA

Ijakó (i)lali,
ifja bóraná,
bóru dárbatá.

Look at my eyes,
eyes of a *borana*,
beaming forth pure morning light.
(From a girls' song)

"The *borana* are the first born. They are the people of the morning. They are nearer to Waqa. Our people have a feeling that Waqa gives all good things to the *borana* and through them to us."
(Mirresa Gamtesa)

1. All land is borana land

"Taking possession of new land for our people is a task for the borana. It is the borana who blesses it and gives it to the *gabaro*. After he has done this, he cannot take it back from the *gabaro* anymore.
He never gives them land to the right (north) of his house, since the *gabaro* have to build their houses to the left of the borana's. He also never gives them land on a high place, since here we slaughter our bulls and sheep for Waqa, and it is only the borana who can do this for the people. If the *gabaro* would do so, Waqa would not accept their sacrifice." (A borana man)

[It is indeed through the ayana of the borana that people feel united to Waqa.]

"Before a borana gives land to the *gabaro*, he takes a clay jar and goes up the hill. He puts the clay jar down on different spots of the slope, every time a little higher. As long as the jar remains standing, the land is for the *gabaro*. Where the clay jar topples over, there the land of the borana begins. On that spot they put stones to mark the border. Beyond these stones no *gabaro* can plough." (Waquma Tollera)

[Since all Matcha clay jars are bulbous in shape they topple over easily. Most hill slopes grow steeper near the top.]

These statements do not mean that, on their move westwards, *gabaro* did not often take possession of land on their own account. It only means that they left the higher places to the borana of their clan (or lineage) that the latter might build their houses there (nearer to Waqa – God/sky) and bring sacrifices on the hill-tops.

> "A *borana* always kills special animals for Waqa – a really good bull. Therefore, Waqa gives him what he asks for. If a *borana* blesses his son, before the latter sets out to kill a buffalo, his son will certainly make a kill." (Old man)

Under the Amharic rule more and more people began to have recourse to the local judge to settle quarrels, thus bypassing their own *gada* judges and the elders of their neighbourhood. With this in mind, we have to understand the words of Ambasse Waqa, himself a borana:

> "Borana never go to the government in order to ask for something. They pray Waqa and Waqa answers their prayers. Also they never go to the lawcourt. When two men quarreled about the boundary between their land, they would come to my father in order to make peace."

> "The borana came from the other side of the Ghibe river. They are of pure Oromo descent.
> A borana stamped his foot on the ground and water came out." (Old man)

2. The Talco stories

This brings us to the Talco stories. It was told to me in several versions, but all of them came directly or indirectly from the Abbichu clan. It is, indeed, a specific clan-story which deals with the borana of the Abbichu only.

None of my informants of other local clans knew the story, which may well indicate that such stories are not commonly passed on to other clans and, if thus, that members of other clans don't pass them on to their children. On the other hand, I found in more remote clans similar stories – all of them to the effect of illustrating the privileged position of the clan's own borana.

I will give here two versions: first that of Waquma Tollera in an interview with his son, my assistant Ensermu. Waquma Tollera is not an

Abbichu himself, but heard the story from one of them. The second version is that of Shagerdi Bukko, himself an Abbichu.

Ens.: "Those Talco people who are they?"
WT.: They are Abbichu. Once there was a rich Abbichu and Talco was his slave. It shouldn't have been so, since he was a borana, but he had been forced, as things were, to live in Abbichu country. His master ordered him to look after the cattle. At noon, Talco prayed Waqa: 'O Waqa, give me water,' and saying this he stamped his foot on the ground in a place where the land was somewhat low-lying. Immediately water sprang up from the earth. After all his cattle had drunk, he once more lifted his arms in prayer and said: 'O Waqa, make the water go back again.' Again he stamped his foot on the ground and the water disappeared.
His master had many children. His sons told him: 'Talco does not bring our cattle to the river. Never have we seen him do this.' At that their father sent for Talco and asked him: 'Why don't you bring our cattle to the river?' and he had him beaten. Every day, his sons said the same thing to their father, and every day Talco was beaten.
'My lord, I indeed water the cattle, Waqa knows,' he said. Eventually his master grew tired of beating him. He hid himself somewhere near the place where Talco had lead his cattle. He saw how Talco brought them to a lower place and heard him praying: 'O Waqa, make your water come up for me.' He saw the water come out and overflow the field, and how the cattle drank. He saw also how Talco prayed once more and how the water disappeared.
He was utterly astonished and said: 'What kind of man he is who does this?' Fear overcame him because he had beaten this youth who had done nothing wrong and who was able to do such great things. However, he said nothing about it. Next day, he hid himself again and saw the same happening repeated. 'My sons,' he said, 'Talco did not allow the cattle to be without water all day.'
After this he called his wife and ordered her to brew beer. He himself called the ritual leaders of his lineage [*lubota*], he slaughtered a bull and set Talco free for fear of Waqa. He did not want such a young man to be his slave. He was sure that Talco was a *borana.*"

Ens.: "Was this the freeing of a slave?"
WT.: "No, it was not: it was adoption. 'This Talco will be my eldest son,' he said."

[Exceptionally, it could happen that a father adopted a boy as his eldest son, thus bypassing his eldest son and all his other sons. It could happen, if he judged his sons to be too weak. What is not said by Waquma Tollera but was explicitly assured me by another informant is that Talco's master was not a *borana* himself.]

Ens.: "Did you ever hear of a slave who did as Talco did?"
WT.: "No, never. I first heard of it when I had settled in this country."
Ens.: "What of Talco's children? Could they do the same as their father?"
WT.: "No, they could not. His power finished with him; he did not pass it on to his sons."
Ens.: "Are his descendants stronger in blessing or cursing than other *borana?*"
WT.: "All of them are *'garami'* [people of peace]. We ask for their blessing but they have no more power than other *borana.*"

By adopting Talco as his eldest son, his master started a *borana* lineage among his offspring, a lineage which would be a source of blessing for all the others. Even water and rain are not given to the people unless thanks to the *borana.* They are the channel through which Waqa acts as the source of all life.

We now turn to the second version, that of Shagerdi Bukko:

"Jiru and Amumma were brothers. One day they set out for the wilderness. There they met Talco and his brother. The two brothers lived there as hunters. Jiru and his brother said to them: 'Come with us.' Jiru was the eldest of the two brothers. He took Talco's brother into his house and Amumma took Talco with him. Amumma said to Talco: 'Take my cattle to the pasture.' Talco looked after the cattle, but he never led them to the river, he only took them where there was good grass. Thus he did each day and every day.
One day Amumma decided to watch him. He went to the place where he thought Talco was. He saw him from far, climbed into

a tree and started to spy on him. It was noon, the time to water the cattle. He saw Talco praying Waqa. After this he saw him stamp his foot on the ground 'dip!'. In the twinkling of an eye the pasture was full of water and the cattle drank. After they had finished, Talco again stamped his foot on the ground. All the water disappeared and the ground closed itself.

The next day Amumma again spyed on Talco and saw the same thing happen. 'This man has something,' he said. 'I'll adopt him as my son.' Amumma said to Jiru: 'Those two men are bad; we should kill them.' 'Why should we kill them?' his eldest brother asked. 'Listen. I will lead Talco that way and you must lead his brother in the opposite direction. As soon as you see vultures above the place where I have gone with Talco, you must kill his brother.' However, when Amumma set out with his servant and Talco, he also took a light-coloured bull with him.

[Dark coloured bulls were reserved for Waqa. Amumma has no intention to bring a sacrifice.]

He killed the bull near a river and from the blood he anointed his own forehead and that of Talco. He also gave him a *medhicha* and said: 'I adopt you as my eldest son.'

[The *medhicha* is a strip of the animal's skin which is tied on the right wrist. It expresses somebody's participation in a ritual, be it sacrificial or otherwise. The length of the *medhicha* is in accordance with the person's social status and the part he plays in the ritual.]

The sky was full of vultures. Jiru saw them from far off and, assuming that his younger brother had killed Talco, killed Talco's brother. Back at home he saw his brother coming and Talco dancing and singing. 'What happened? What did you do?' he asked. When he heard what his younger brother had done, how he had spied on Talco and discovered that he was a borana, he said: 'O Amumma, you adopted your borana and made me kill mine. You grudged him to me. Your foul play will profit you not at all. May Talco's people multiply, may he outnumber you [by his offspring] and, after being outnumbered by him, die.'

[A well motivated curse of an eldest brother at the address of a younger one.]

Talco married and begot five sons.
Thus it is that we, Abbichu, have five lineages and why in every lineage there are *borana.* Thus it is that we pray 'in the name of the five sons of Talco'. *(Ayana shanan Talco.)*
Of Amumma's offspring no one survived."

About Jiru's offspring nothing is said. Shagerdi is concentrated on Talco, on the role he plays in the Abbichu clan, and on the effect of the eldest brother's curse.

3. The borana's obligation to bless

The borana possess not only the power to pass on Waqa's blessing (in all its forms) to the people, they are also obliged to do so. Young Ensermu told me:

> "When a borana enters my house and I have a young calf in the *gola* (fireplace in the house), I will bring him my calf. 'Please, spit on it,' I say to him. I do the same with my chicks. The borana spits on them and says: 'Be protected from the evil eye. Grow up, grow well.' But nowadays there are people who no longer believe in such things that much. Even some borana are reluctant. If they do act this way, they are bad people. They grudge other people the good things they have."

4. The borana's curse

A borana then can withold his blessing rightly or wrongly; he can also curse explicitly. In both cases the effect is the same.

> "If a borana does not bless my calf, my calf will grow sick. It will get a skin-disease and loose all its hairs. It even may die. It also grows very thin. People, too, can get this disease. Nobody exactly knows what it is, but I saw it several times. We say of such a calf '*hindoramte* – its growth has been stopped."
>
> (Ensermu Waquma)

> "There was a man, Bala Mila. He left his wife and married another. He fought as a soldier for many years. Once, after a long time, he came back to his first wife's house. He said to her: '*Nagaa na kenna* – wish me peace.'

[He uses the polite form of the verb which no man ever uses for his wife. In addition the simple fact that he greets her indicates that he does not regard her as his wife any more. A man never greets his wife when he comes home, not even after a long absence.]

She gave him something to eat. After this he went out to have a look at the crops managed by his wife and children. He came back to a field where his son was working. The son said: 'What are you doing here? This field is mine.' – 'My son,' the father said, 'why do you speak this way? I am doing nothing harmful to your field. But because you speak to me this way, listen to my words: 'You came from between my legs, so, loose your leg.' That very day people of the Mutcho clan came to fight this family and the son lost his leg in the fight. That father was a borana.' (An old man)

It becomes clear from these examples that *borana* can also misuse their power. The people's attitude against them, indeed, is not only one of respect but also of fear. "The eye of a *borana* makes wet wood grow dry", they say.

On a wedding party a girl insulted a borana boy. She sang:

"Qárabá dhabdé;	You did not know the circumcision-knife
wáshaláan hafté."	you stayed with an uncircumcised penis.

The boy answered:

"Gémo hádhakéti	The hearth-stones of your mother
qabáaddhu haafi."	stay for ever with them.

The girl has never married. She is still alife. The boy died before she could ask him to retract his curse. (Gammachu Magarsa)

5. A dark-blue tongue

In connection with the borana's power to bless and to curse, people will speak of them as having a dark-blue or a dark-grey tongue. While speaking this way, they refer to the underside of the tongue.

The dark-blue (grey) tongue is related to the dark-grey Waqa. The dark-grey Waqa spends his blessing through rain and, sometimes, kills with his lightning; the borana's tongue, too, blesses and curses.

"The dark-blue tongue of the borana is related to the dark-coloured Waqa. Cattle and sheep, too, have a dark-blue tongue, they are animals of peace. It's therefore that we are glad if we have dark-blue gums." (Gammachu Magarsa)

"The borana's spittle has blessing and so has his tongue. His tongue can both bless and kill; it is dark-blue. Whenever you see a person with such a dark-blue tongue, you can be sure that he is a borana. Whoever has no dark-blue tongue is not a borana." (An old man)

None of my assistants seemed very sure about this blunt statement Ensermu, whose mother is a borana, once told me: "My mother's brother's tongue is a little bit dark-blue. He never said this of his mother's tongue.

As I see it, the whole idea has more to do with the borana's power to curse and to bless than with the colour of their tongue as a result of descent.

6. Two highly respected ritual objects

They belong respectively to the world of men and to the world of women. The function of the first one is to curse, that of the second one only to bless. The first is exclusively connected with the *borana*, the second not so (here, too, the women have gone their own way). The first one is called *'kallacha'*, the second *'tchatchu'*.

a. The kallacha

Gammachu Magarsa:

"My grandfather and grandmother had a *kallacha* and a *tchatchu* in their house. I have seen both of them. After they had become Christians, they have done away with them.

The *kallacha* consisted of three tubes of iron, each about ten centimeters long, with some simple designs on them. They were strung at the sinew of a sheep – the sinew which runs along its spine and which is very strong when it has dried. Between these three tubes of iron were three times three big black beads, more or less round and probably made of *wadesa* wood.

On the right side in my grandfather's backroom stood a wooden stand, a tripod, from which at the top two branches parted. On the right branch hung the *kallacha,* wrapped in a piece of cloth, on the left one the *tchatchu,* uncovered. Thus it was in my grandfather's house. Perhaps in other houses the *kallacha* was kept in a basket and this basket in its turn was put into a special clay-jar, as you were told by other people. The *ayana* of the various clans are not the same; what is regarded as irrespectful or dangerous in one clan, does not need to be regarded that way by another. The form of the *kallacha,* too, may well be different."

"People believe that the iron of the *kallacha* came from heaven; that it was thrown on the earth by the lightning. It's therefore that the *kallacha* is used to make people speak the truth when they take an oath. The *kallacha* is very dangerous.
If you came across a *kallacha* on your way, you took *tchokorsa* grass and earth in your hands and threw them towards the *kallacha,* saying: 'Don't harm me!' The *kallacha* is something of the very beginning of our people.
It does not leave the house, unless a he-goat has been killed. The man who appeals to the *kallacha* has to give this goat. But the holder of the *kallacha* has to slaughter it himself. He eats that goat with his family." (Dinsa Sarba)

"When the *kallacha* is taken out anywhere, it is first smeared with blood from the he-goat that has been slaughtered. A man who is not in peace with others, or who is unclean as a result of sexual intercourse, cannot enter the place where the *kallacha* is kept. It is always kept in a pure *borana's* house."
(Shagerdi Bukko)

None of my older informants had ever seen a *kallacha.* This does not mean that they never saw it used, but that the *kallacha* was always carried in a cloth. In contrast to what Gammachu Magarsa saw in his grandfather's house, Shagerdi Bukko told me that he had been told that the *kallacha* was kept in a little grass-basket which, again, was put into a special clay-jar. Such a way of keeping it, is, indeed, more in accordance with the awe the object inspired.

For the rest both the form of the *kallacha* and the way it was handled may well have differed according to the clans. Every clan who counted *borana* had also a *kallacha.* But this *kallacha* was only en-

trusted to one single *borana* lineage, where it passed from the father to the eldest son.

The following information from Waquma Tollera (himself an eastern Matcha) was confirmed by my informants of the Dembidollo area:

> "When a father hands his *kallacha* over to his son, he will say to him: 'My son, I hand you over this *kallacha.* It came down from heaven from the very beginning. It is something from our first ancestors. As long as you are keeping it, don't bend the truth, do not plough, do not weed. Eat and drink what the *kallacha* gives you.'
>
> [People had to plough and weed for him.]
>
> After this, he slaughters a bull and the son has to wash his hands in the bull's blood to cleanse himself from all bad things. Then he takes over the *kallacha.* While doing so, he says: 'I have taken over the *kallacha* from you. I will keep it as you did.'
>
> The guardian of a *kallacha* is highly respected. Whenever he goes through the land carrying his *kallacha,* nobody can cross the road in front of him. Instead he will pick up some *tchokorsa* grass (a symbol of peace) and throw it towards the *kallacha*, and while doing so he will avoid looking up at it.
>
> When it is difficult to make peace between people, they use this *kallacha* in order to curse those who persist in their refusal to make peace. If needed the holder of the *kallacha* goes to those people's house carrying the *kallacha* straight in front of him. The *kallacha* is wrapped in a cloth.
>
> When two men were quarreling about the border of their land and one of them refused to abide by the decision of the elders, he could appeal to the *kallacha.* In this case the two men must keep a stand in front of the *kallacha* with their hands outstretched (in a gesture of defense). The *abba kallacha* would ask them: 'Are you sure that the boundary of your land is such and such?' – 'Yes,' they would say, 'by the *kallacha* that is how it is.'
>
> At that the *abba kallacha* would reply: 'If you have spoken the truth, may you keep life. If you have told a lie by saying that the land is yours, may this *kallacha* destroy your family.'
>
> The *kallacha* would strike a liar immediately. Within a year nothing would be left of his compound.
>
> [Ensermu: "When my father is speaking about things like these, his face changes dramatically."]

The *kallacha* was also used to force people to yield to the demand of others. For instance when the elders had decided that a man had to give his daughter to a young widower with children or that he had to give one of his children into adoption to a childless couple.

After a murder the bereaved family was expected to resist all attempts at reconciliation, unless they were forced to do so by the *kallacha.* In all such cases the request was enforced by the presence of lame, crippled and blind people as a symbol of the things which would befall the people in question, if they would persist in their refusal.

These people would start shouting then: "*Muu-muu-muu!*" a veiled curse which meant: "May the *kallacha* strike you with sickness, lameness, blindness, may it make you the way we are!"

Usually, however, there was an element of theatre in this performance. People could put off their compliance with the request until the coming of the *kallacha,* in order to display their grief about their murdered kinsman, the child they had to part with or the daughter they had to marry to a widower instead of to a young unmarried man. It stressed the generosity of their gesture.

The *kallacha* was believed to strike most fiercely on the occasion of an oath-taking in front of the hole of a wild pig out in the wilderness, beyond the world of man. At this curious ritual it was forbidden even to mention Waqa's name. If one of the parties did so, his oath was not accepted. After the oath both parties would run apart in opposite directions and the oath-takers would remain enemies for ever, unless a difficult peacemaking ritual was undertaken later.

At the time of my research, there was still a man in Dembidollo who had a *kallacha*. His name was Abba Tchatchu (Father of Tchatchu, his daughter's name). I asked Mirresa to pay him a visit, but Mirresa seemed reluctant. "We are afraid to put questions about the *kallacha,*" he said. Here now follows his report of several contacts he made with Abba Tchatchu.

> "I have spoken with Abba Tchatchu. He is an Amumma like I am myself. This made it easier for me.
> I came across him in a coffee-house. I was there with several other men and we drank honeywine. I bought some honeywine for him and asked him: 'Do you know me?' He said: 'I was just looking at you to see who you were. Could you tell me who your father is?' — 'My father's name is Gamtesa and I am of the lineage of Gole Balla.' — 'Gole Balla was a friend of mine,' he said, 'a hero of Danqa country. He was the warleader in our clan.'

After this I talked a little further with him. You must go very slowly with such an old and venerable man; you must take your time. I dared not to speak about the *kallacha* as yet. That's not good. First you must talk with him several times and, perhaps, he will show me his *kallacha* later on, and allow me to take a photo of it. I'll tell him: 'Look, you are already old, nearly eighty years, and your son will not care about the *kallacha;* I would like to have a photo of it together with you.'

Last week I saw him again. I asked him:
Mir.: "Where does that kallacha come from? From whom did your grandfather get it?"
AT.: "I don't know, but there is an older man here, Mardasa Tullu. He could be my father. Perhaps he knows."
Mir.: "Is there any difference between our kallacha [that of the Amumma clan] and those of other clans?"
AT.: "Our kallacha was a very fierce one. It struck immediately."
Mir.: "I read in a book that the kallacha came from heaven."
AT.: "Some people say this, indeed. As for me, I do not know."
Mir.: "When did they use the kallacha?"
AT.: "When a child was adopted, when they took an oath, when a slave was set free, when they went to ask for a girl, and also when somebody had killed another man and wanted to make peace. In this case the killer's representatives went together with the kallacha to the house of that other family and, while they were sitting there in front of the house, together with the abba kallacha and some older men, they asked for peace."
Mir.: "Did you ever go out with the kallacha to the adoption of a child?"
AT.: "It was my elder brother who did so, and I went with him. After his death I got the kallacha."
Mir.: "Did you ever go out with the kallacha for the taking of an oath?"
AT.: "No, but once I brought it to someone's house after a man had been killed in order to ask for peace."
Mir.: "How did you carry the kallacha?"
AT.: "In my hands, wrapped in a piece of cloth. We sat down in front of the house and the people agreed to make peace. They did not speak very much, since we had the kallacha with us."
Mir.: "That piece of cloth you covered the kallacha with, was it old or new?"

AT.: "It was new."
Mir.: "If I want to adopt a child, what must I pay?"
AT.: "That is not precisely settled, but you must slaughter a he-goat in front of my house and the kallacha is anointed with its blood before it comes to your house."
Mir.: "I am disappointed that I cannot see the kallacha."
AT.: "It is impossible to touch it, unless you have clean hands."
Mir.: "When people take an oath with a dry maize-ear or with a spear, do they, in addition, ask for the kallacha?"
AT.: "When people take an oath with an empty maize-ear, they say: 'If I am not telling the truth, let my body dry up like this maize-ear.' When they use a spear, they say: 'If I am not telling the truth, let Waqa's spear [lightning] kill me.' When the kallacha is there, however, they do not say such things: the kallacha alone is powerful enought. Rather they use the kallacha only for things of great importance."
Mir.: "I was told that also some *qallu* had a kallacha."
AT.: "Yes, they did. But theirs was not a true kallacha."

[Indeed, the *qallicha* Abba Saba (who was no longer alive at that time, cf. chap. 13, Remark) had made such a fake kallacha in order to frighten people.]

After reporting me this conversation, Mirresa remarked: "I had the impression that Abba Tchatchu did not want to tell me everything."

Spite this, the old man's answers shed a light on several aspects of the people's belief in the kallacha's power, as I had noticed them already along other ways. Indeed, though they invariably showed a great awe in regard to the kallacha and also would say that the kallacha came from heaven, they also on occasion showed some doubt whether all their particular kallacha – their many clan kallacha that is – had been really made from 'iron from heaven'. [26]

[26] Knutsson (1967:88–90) writes about the kallacha in eastern Matchaland: "Unfortunately, I was never allowed to see a *kalača* in Macha ... It is described as a conically formed 'lump' of black iron, and is made only by special *tumtu*, blacksmiths, who are believed to use metal brought from heaven by the lightning."
He also gives a myth which has many similarities to the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac: "... But at the very moment that they put the sacrificial knife to the boy's throat, a lamb came down from heaven and on its back the lamb bore *č̣aču* and *kalača*." (For typographical reasons I had to change Knutsson's orthography of the words 'kallacha' and 'tchatchu'.)
Knutsson's description of the kallacha as 'a lump of iron' is in accordance with some descriptions 'from hear say' of my informants.

But this did not affect their belief in the kallacha in general as a great present, given to them by Waqa – a help to maintain the social order he had given to them. Above all they wanted to the uphold their belief in the divine origin of their own clan-kallacha.

This view of their own kallacha was formulated by Gammachu Magarsa in this way:

> "The kallacha must be made of iron that has been thrown down on earth by the lightning. The lightning is a sign of Waqa's anger. Waqa strikes people with his lightning, if they refuse to keep peace with one another.
> The iron which is thrown on earth by lightning is a dead thing like all iron is. It has no life, it does not sprout like a tree, it has no life whatever. But it is strong and can destroy life.
> If such iron comes from Waqa, it is a token on his part that he can destroy life even though he normally does so by simply withdrawing. My ancestor Qalitti Galabu had a spear made of such iron. Such a spear, made of Waqa's iron, never misses its aim. If you throw it in the night, it will find its aim of itself. If you throw it in the market place, it will strike one man after another, but never will it hit innocent people. Such is also the kallacha. It was my grandfather who told me all these things."

Remark

The eastern Oromo have quite another kind of kallacha. It is an ornament, often described as phallic but also, on occasion, as a white metal horn which is worn on the forehead. My assistant Gammachu, when he saw such a kallacha for the first time with the borana, was utterly amazed to hear that these Oromo were wearing an iron object as a symbol of fertility. His comment was: "If iron were a symbol of life, the blacksmiths would not be despised." To him the horn-symbolism would be more natural. Is not every man a bull?[27]

b. The tchatchu

In several respects the *tchatchu* is the direct opposite of the *kallacha.* It is an oval leatherstrip on which nine cowrie shells are sewn

[27] E. Haberland speaks without a shadow of doubt always of a phallic ornament (1963:51, 305). P.T.W. Baxter in his article 'REPETITION IN CERTAIN BORANA CEREMONIES' speaks of a 'white metal horn'. But he assured me personally that the Arsi Oromo gave him only a phallic interpretation. The form of this kallacha is, indeed, evidently phallic. For the rest, a symbol can have many associations.

and from which two other strips are dangling. It is a ritual object used only by women, and is worn on the right wrist. (Cowrie shells are a symbol of female fertility, and the number nine is a symbol of 'fullness'.)

As the kallacha is kept by a borana man, so the tchatchu is kept by a borana woman, but unlike the kallacha a tchatchu may sometimes be found with the wife of a landlord, even if she is not a borana. While there is only one single kallacha in every clan, we find tchatchu in many neighbourhoods, where they are used by the women at several of their communal rituals, at which the *'hadha tchatchu* – the mother of the tchatchu' acts as a leader. Like all ritual objects, the tchatchu, too, is kept in the backroom on the right side, but it is not hidden in a basket or clay-jar as kallacha sometimes are: it is an object of blessing, not of curse. Its normal place is on a wooden hook (never an iron one) where it can be seen by all.

No animal is slaughtered, before the tchatchu leaves the house in order to accompany the women to the place of their libations and their ritual meal under a tree. As we stated already, as long as it is in the house, it is not covered with a piece of cloth; however, when it goes out it is always covered. Since it is an object of blessing, people do not throw *tchokorsa* grass in its direction to prevent it from harming them.

> "When we went out for the *Yarabbi* ritual (libations beneath a big tree to ask a good harvest), the 'mother of the *tchatchu*' had to keep it carefully in her hands as long as we were on our way to the tree. There she would sit down on a *barchumma* (three-legged Oromo stool) and only then we would put it on her wrist. She must not fall with the *tchatchu* while she is walking or sitting on her chair. When she has to make her libation, she puts the *tchatchu* on top of a clay-jar. The *tchatchu* must always be at rest.
>
> Everyone approaching the *tchatchu,* the 'mother of the *tchatchu'* says: *'Horri, horri* – be fertile, produce'. Only people who look on the *tchatchu* with jealous eyes, will be harmed by it.
>
> Our ritual is only complete when the *tchatchu* has been returned to its wooden hook. No one will touch it there. It is only taken from the hook for the sake of our rituals."
>
> (Hadha Serdo, an old woman)

Yá hadháko gúrattĭ;	O mother, your face is dark (a slave's);

enyúti hatĭ garbá?	but is a mother ever a slave in her son's eyes?
Anaf sĭtu wárqedhá.	To me you are gold.
Yá hadháko ná desé,	O mother who gave me birth,
ánu sĭf fidérattĭ;	I have brought you a fine tchatchu;
tchátchu hĭdachún gesé.	time has come now for you to put it on your wrist.

Such personal tchatchu may be given to non-borana women. They are more an ornament than a ritual object. The form, too, is different. They consist of three giant snail-shells, as they are found in the wilderness, hung on a very thin strip of the skin of the buffalo her son has killed.

7. The borana open the way

"The borana are the eldest ones," as people say. "It is the *ayana* of the eldest brother who opens the way for his younger brothers."

He does this in more than one way. First, by the very fact that he is the first to make his way out of his mother's womb into the world. Secondly, because he is expected to continue 'opening the way' for his younger brothers in this life, showing them the right way and helping them along that way. When the father dies prematurely, the eldest son is supposed to take his place with his younger brothers as far as possible.

"The borana are nearer to Waqa." They are nearer to Waqa as an eldest son is nearer to his father than his brothers are, and this is a great deal. So much so that my assistant Gammachu Magarsa, himself a borana and not the eldest son, insisted to me: "The eldest son is his father much more than all the others together. If his father is a borana, the eldest son is much more borana than the others. A lineage of borana weakens when an eldest son dies before begetting a son."

This view of an eldest son's place is reflected in the fact that he inherits the greater part of his father's property.

All these things we must keep in mind, when we consider the borana's privileged position in Matcha society, and when we see how much this higher position they held was accepted without question by the others. Indeed, they did not wish otherwise than that the highest offices were given to borana, that the borana preceded them in public rituals, that the borana were their leaders in intertribe and interclan rela-

tions, in short, that the borana opened the way for all their activities. All this guaranteed Waqa's blessing.

This did not mean that the borana were not assisted by others, if the latter proved to surpass them for instance in knowledge of the law, skill in warfare and in conducting negotiations, in cattle rearing and farming. But the work as a whole had always to be done under their auspices. It was they who had to 'open the way'.

This was expressed in many forms of social intercourse and interaction.

> "No one would ever overtake and pass a borana. He must wait until the borana says 'Ofkalli – pass by', but a borana would always do this." (Shagerdi Bukko)

> "When the time of ploughing had come, the gabaro and other people of lower standing had to wait until the borana had started ploughing." (Waquma Tollera)

> "Men of the gada group in power would never start their *butta* ritual (the slaughtering of a bull – their highest personal ritual in the course of their period of rule) before the borana among them had done so." (Shagerdi Bukko)

> "When some new item was imported into our country, say by traders, the borana had first to bless it for us." (An old man)

At the yearly ritual of thanksgiving after harvest (*dibayu*), the difference between borana and gabaro was given expression to in several ways.

> "At *dibayu* all men went up the mountain in order to offer beer as a libation to the earth and to slaughter an animal for Waqa. But the borana would go up to the very top and there slaughter a fine bull, whilst the gabaro had to do these things half down the slope and could only slaughter an old cow or a sheep." (Dinsa Sarba)

As we will see later, the borana had their own weekly holyday, Friday, and would keep it more strictly and with more prayers and sacrifices than the gabaro who had theirs on Wednesday. "Their *ayana* are different."

8. "Our people have a feeling that our rulers should not work"

(Mirresa Gamtesa)

Because of their social-religious position, the borana did not work as much as the lower people.

They had more land and also more slaves than most of the others. In addition, they had special obligations in regard to their people's well-being. They had to take part in peace-negotiations and the rites connected with it, in meetings on behalf of the country, and in more private rituals, whose efficacy depended also on their blessing.

In a country where time is counted for little, where meetings tend to be protracted endlessly, where quarrels are frequent (especially about land and cattle) and where good relations with one's fellow-people are essential (partaking in funerals, weddings, and paying visits to sick friends) there was not much time left for them to work.

The people's attitude to work in general has significance here. Whenever Matcha settle among neighbouring peoples of a different culture, they certainly have the name of not working less than the others, rather the contrary. But they share with them the view that man works out of necessity rather than on the basis of a moral obligation, a work-ethos. No Matcha farmer dreams of continuing to work until his old age in order his better economical position. Rather he dreams of gradually leaving the work in the fields to his sons in favour of becoming a socially important man, a man who is asked to take part in marriage and peace negotiations, and who has an authoritative voice in meetings on behalf of the country at large.

Another source of this attitude is to be found in their view – they would prefer themselves the word 'experience' – that man is utterly dependent for his well-being on many forces in nature beyond his control, and finally, above everything, he is dependent on Waqa's will.

This attitude is combined with and encouraged by the idea that they honour Waqa by relying on him; the idea, also, that Waqa does not like people who are acting as if all things depend on themselves.

Well-being in all its forms, including procreation, social respectability, and keeping peace with other people is seen first of all as a gift of Waqa. People who enjoy it have a good *ayana*, they are nearer to Waqa. Being nearer to Waqa, the borana were expected to display this blessing on Waqa's part first of all in their own lives. Only then could they impart it to the people.

The best illustration of this view was to be found in the person of the ritual leader of the *gada* group in power. He was forbidden to kill

(unless for sacrifice), to plough (to wound the earth for the sake of his livelihood), to cut trees, to tire himself. He could not sit on a broken stool nor drink from a broken cup. His house had to be 'full' always – full of grain, young calves, milk, beer, and honeywine. He was forbidden to drink water. He was chosen from a borana family of pure descent which had showed for years that Waqa had blessed them in a special way. Both his first wife and his eldest son should be alive and there should be little disease among his children and cattle.

The *gada*-set in power as a whole, too, had to display that they were blessed by Waqa. Once a month, they had to take care that their houses were 'full' in the same way as that of their ritual leader.

I was told that even a local despot like Jote would release them from taxe because of this.

We have already mentioned that the guardian of the *kallacha* was also forbidden to work.

All these people had to be symbols (in the full sense of the word) of their people's well-being. It was the first and foremost thing society asked from them.

Indeed, I never had an impression that people begrudged the borana their privileged status in the past, as long as they were first of all *nama ebba,* that is: people blessed by Waqa and transmitting this blessing to them.

Nowadays, the priests' position reminds one of the borana's in several aspects. In spite of having ex-patriate priests among them for many years, people are still puzzled to find that these priests are working hard. Indeed, my own research work was no exception to this.

In their eyes, a priest, much like their ancient borana, should be first of all a man of blessing and prayer, a man who reminds them continually of their obligation to 'go under Waqa's law', a man who goes around from homestead to homestead to bless the sick, the children, the cattle and the crops, and to speak 'words of peace' to people. They invariably showed their satisfaction whenever I myself acted thus.

When the first person they see in the morning is a priest, they are convinced that their day will be good.

Whenever I had prayed for rain in the church and the rain had come, it was attributed to my prayer, and, like Shagerdi Bukko, I was sometimes called '*abba boka* – the one who makes it rain'.

Whenever I blessed a sick person, people believed that any change for the better in his (her) condition was just due to this blessing.

Whenever I entered their house, they were pleased if I blessed the children, a young calf or their chicks.

Once, while I was about to leave the mission for a longer time, two women I did not know, approached me. They had come to ask for some money to buy seeds. I told them that I had not any money left. To which one of them replied: "Please then give us your blessing. Your blessing will do." "A priest is *'abba jirenya* – a father (dispenser) of life'," as one of my assistants phrased it.

People do not want their priests to go in shabby clothes or without one or two servants to carry their bags. They do not want them not to have a good life materially. Like the borana they have to show that Waqa has blessed themselves in a special way here on this earth. (We noted already that blessings in the afterlife do not appeal much to them.)

> "What you say of the Catholic priests also holds good of the Protestant pastors – but not for the Orthodox priests. One could say that you are playing now the part people would have liked to keep for their own borana." (Gammachu Magarsa)

The borana then certainly worked less than the others. It made them more vulnerable to the social change that had to come, to the abolition of slavery, the increasing independence of others on them and the decrease in the people's belief in their indispensability as canals of blessing.

As a fact, of the few pure borana in the area (their number probably does not amount to more than 3 % of the population) a relatively great number belong to the poorer people, nowadays.

9. Holidays

> "Borana don't work on Friday (*Jimata*). On that day, they do not plough, they do not cut trees, their oxen are not put under the yoke nor do they lend them out, no more than they lend ut their farming tools or their slaves. Their wives and female slaves don't fetch water or collect firewood.
>
> On that day, borana refrain from eating cooked food or food that has been broken by grinding; they only eat *akayi* (roasted grains). However, they do make *buna qala* (coffee-fruit stewed in butter – a highly ritual food) and they can drink beer and honeywine, prepared on previous days.

They do not dance. They do not go far from home. They do not sweep their houses, or only so as to put the dirt in a corner near the door: they never sweep it out.
The milk from their cows does not leave the house, unless for a very sick person or for a woman who has just given birth.
They do not kill for eating; they only kill for Waqa or for the *ayana* of the Friday. They abstain from sexual intercourse. They only pray Waqa. Some borana women will not wear a belt and their men no trousers but only a blanket.
They say: 'Our first ancestors, the first nine *borana,* have made this day a holiday. If we work on this day, our work will not be blessed.' " (Shagerdi Bukko and some *borana* informants)

The ritual dress of which is spoken here is called '*olga*'. It is the dress of the Matcha's remote ancestors. Hence we are confronted here with a return to the pure beginning. It is found in several rituals. Abstention from sexual intercourse goes with all rituals of some importance.

To the Matcha the day begins at evening-twilight. In regard to their not going far from home and keeping the dirt in the house my assistant Asafa told me: "While I was still young, my father did the same."

Ensermu Waquma:

"My mother's brother once ignored the proscription against working on Friday. That very day, while he was cutting a piece of wood, his knife shot out of his hand and hit his right leg. 'Friday (the *ayana* of the day) has power,' he said. From then onwards he never has worked on Friday again."

Several times while we were speaking about the borana's holiday my borana informants would comment on their attitude saying: "If we work on Friday, our work will not be blessed." They also sometimes would quote the saying: "A man who is in want of nothing does not keep the Sunday." A modern version of an older saying, that such a man does not keep the holiday, be it Friday or Wednesday. It means that a man who does not feel dependent on Waqa works on Sunday. Or they would illustrate their view of things by an example like this:

"N.N. was working all the days of the week. People told him: 'Your work will be in vain. You are working the whole week. What will you gain of your work on Sunday? If Waqa blesses

my work two days a week only, I will have no need to work more. Don't transgress the limits put by Waqa. Don't take more days to work than he has given you'."

The Matcha are deeply convinced indeed – and in their eyes this is a matter of experience – that man should not try to take his fate entirely in his own hands. His doing so would, ultimately, mean his undoing. It is a denial of reality. Too much well-being is liable to make him forget Waqa. As it is expressed in the prayer Shagerdi Bukko taught me:

"O Waqa, don't give us too much, lest we may forget you;
don't give us too little, lest we may perish."

Presently, more than 90 % of the population are Christians and the rest are Muslim. Only a minority of the older generation continue to cling to their old holidays and then only in part. Still one hears, from time to time, older people complaining about the changes. Though they do realize that the social change which came over them has its bright sides and is anyhow nobody's fault, they cannot help laying the blame for it on the borana who started working on Friday and gave up their ancient food-taboos, thus losing their power to bless.

10. Food-taboos

Matcha know many food-taboos and the borana, too, have some of their own; they neither eat sheep or the forelegs of any animal.

a. sheep (*hola*)

"Borana do not eat sheep. Some of them broke this law of theirs and lost their power to bless and to curse." (Waquma Tollera)

"My wife's grandmother who was a borana, would never enter a house where a sheep had been killed." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

"Once a baboon caught a sheep of mine. I ran after the baboon and he let go of my sheep. But it was badly wounded and I cut its throat. After this I became half blind. It was because I had killed that sheep." (An old borana)

[On which Mirresa Gamtesa commented: "He was a borana and saw the blood of that sheep with his eyes. Therefore his eyes became blind."]

Nowadays most borana have abandoned this custom. Thus an old relative of my assistant Asafa who confided to him:

> "I myself began to eat sheep; I abandoned keeping my eyes from their blood. But my father never saw any sheep-blood nor did he ever eat their meat."
>
> "My mother is a borana and, for a long time, she did not eat sheep-meat." (Ensermu Waquma)

I never heard of any myth supporting this food-taboo. The reasons for it I was given came always to the same thing:

> "Borana are called *'garami* – people of peace' and sheep, too, are called *'garami'*. Sheep don't hurt you underhand; people feel perfectly safe with them. A sheep has also a dark-blue tongue." (Ensermu)
>
> "Borana do not eat sheep, because sheep are borana; they are *'garami'*." (Shagerdi Bukko)

When, more and more, Ethiopian priests settled in the area after 1918, they often spoke against the traditional Matcha customs. The man who told us of the sheep and the baboon, had a story about this.

> "Because being borana we did not eat sheep, people were accustomed to give us, everytime we came together, a hen. We would eat the hen and they themselves would eat a sheep. One day, there was also a priest in the house. He had his bible with him and said to us: 'I am going to ask you something; will you oblige me?' – 'Yes,' we said, 'we will do what you ask from us.' At that he said: 'Let there not be two knives at the same meal and between the same people.'
>
> [Hens and sheep had to be killed with different knives.]
>
> So all of us ate sheep. I did not come to any harm."

b. The forelegs (*irre*)

Here, too, any myth seems to be lacking. But the following explanation of Gammachu Magarsa deserves to be mentioned. (A.=Author)

GM.: "You know that we call a man's forearm and an animal's forelegs *'irre'*. But *'irre'* also means strength, power. While speaking of a man's strength, our people think first of all of his arms. We say of such a man: *'Irre qaba* – he has *irre'*. We say the same of Waqa: *'Irren Waqa si hadhau* – May Waqa's *irre* strike you'. Our people believe that it is an animal's forelegs that makes it run fast. It's with his forelegs that a lion or a leopard grasps his prey and attacks man. When we fire at an animal, we always try to hit it behind the forelegs."

A.: "Is that not because you want to hit its heart?"

GM.: "We do not think of the heart. We see it this way: by hitting the animal there, we separate its forelegs from his body. You remember that old woman whom I interviewed a few weeks ago. You yourself asked me to ask her about the *irre*, after I had told you that she knew very much and had still a surprisingly clear brain. So I asked her, why the borana did not eat the forelegs of an animal. She replied immediately: *'Irren irre hinnyatu* – *irre* does not eat *irre*, power does not eat power.' This means: the borana are people of power; they have power to bless and to curse. The forelegs of animals have also power. Therefore, the borana do not eat them.

It is the same with the sheep. The sheep is an animal of peace and the borana, too, are people of peace. Therefore they do not eat sheep."

"It is like eating oneself. Man does not eat man."

(Gammachu Magarsa)

[The association arm-forelegs-power and the prohibition of eating the animal's forelegs are not only found among the Oromo. We also find them e.g. with the early Hebrews, whose ways of life and thought have many features in common with the Oromo's.]

11. Second rank borana

There are pure borana and less pure borana; and the latter are, again, differently ranked. Highest are the children of a borana father and a gabaro mother. Next come those who are born from a borana and a female slave who is considered as his wife. The lowest ones are those born from a borana father and a slavemaid who is not considered as his wife.

There is, however, a great difference between the children of a gabaro wife and those of female slaves, even those of the first category. Though the latter in everyday life are called such a man's wives, neither borana or gabaro were accustomed to marry them in the proper sense of the word. Oromo marriage proper is performed by the slaughtering of a sheep in front of the groom's house, a ritual called *'rakko'*. The sheep here is a symbol of the bride who is going to shed her maiden-blood for the sake of motherhood, or rather for the sake of giving children – and especially sons – to her husband's lineage. Only the children of such a marriage can claim a part of the heritage as it is laid down in Matcha law. Such a 'real' marriage was only contracted with a Matcha girl.

The children of female slaves could not claim any part of the heritage though the father could, and normally would, give them some land and cattle.

> "Sometimes, when somebody had not enough money, he could first 'marry' a slave and later on a real wife. But the son of the slave never would be his eldest son, though his father could give him some land and cattle." (Shagerdi Bukko)

It is in this light that we must read the following texts.

> "We borana have two branches: the pure borana who are children of a pure borana father and a pure borana mother, and those who are children of a pure borana father and a gabaro or slave mother. The latter do have boranaship, but they cannot bless or curse. Only the pure borana can do this." (A borana man)

> "Let us say, a pure borana has three wives: the first a pure borana like himself, the second a gabaro, and the third a slave. All his children form one single lineage. All of them are called 'borana'. But those of the second and third wife are not of pure descent. Accordingly, they are not allowed to take part in the rituals of the pure borana. So even in the same lineage the blood is not the same." (Shagerdi Bukko)

> "In regard to a female slave two kinds of relationship were possible: If the man gave her everything she needed – a house, food, land, and cattle – she was called *'gaya'* by all his children

(*'gaya'* is the name for a father's wife who is not your mother), even if he did not perform the *rakko* ritual with her.
If, however, he did not build a house for her, she was not 'gaya' for his children. In this case a man and woman were said to be one another's *'sanyo'*.

[*Sanyo* are people who have regular sexual intercourse with one another, but who are not considered as husband and wife.]

My grandfather has a younger brother, called Kaluja. He was a son of my grandfather's female slave to whom he had given a house and everything she needed. All my grandfather's children called her *'gaya'* and Kaluja called my grandfather 'father', but my grandfather himself never called him 'my son'.

(Gammachu Magarsa)

"The children of a female slave had boranaship and were free people. But in spite of this they had to acknowledge the pure borana as their masters, and had to work for them. If they failed to do so, they were cursed. Such a curse had effect; I saw this myself." (Ambassa Waqo, second rate borana)

"Take N.N. His father had a slave-maid and he slept with her. They were *sanyo* to one another. He had two children from her, a boy and a girl. These children were counted as gabaro by people, though they did have boranaship, if only a little. Because his father was a borana, the boy even succeeded in marrying a borana girl." (A borana man)

Commenting on this text Mirresa Gamtesa added:

"But such boys had to go far away in order to find such a girl. They had to go to a country where their family was not known. We have a saying: 'A dough-jar, after it has crossed a river, says that it always contained honeywine'."

[In a far away country it is easy to boast at one's high descent.]

Some remarks

1. It was custom that the first wife in rank, always an Oromo wife (she did not need to be the first wife in time) would have her house to the right of her hus-

band's, the second to the left, the third to the left of the second and so on. The land to the right was for the sons of the first wife. The land to the left was for the sons of the 'little wives'.

2. Less formal sexual relationships (without *rakko*) were influenced by economical considerations.

> "In former times, people often did not want to have many children [from a marriage proper], because of the land they had to divide among them."
> (Mirresa Gamtesa)

12. Once more the borana's ayana

So far we paid little attention to 'the invisible part' of the borana's world, their ayana. It is an aspect of their world with which we must deal of necessity, if we wish to understand what boranaship means to people.

None of my older informants ever made it clear to me. What follows is a compilation of several talks I had about the matter with my young assistant Gammachu Magarsa. He says:

> "According to our view of things, the eldest son alone possesses full boranaship. The other brothers have less of it according to their being younger, i.e. at a greater distance from their eldest brother.
> On the one side stands the eldest brother, on the other side all his younger brothers. The distance between the eldest brother and the second one is much greater than the distance between the second one and all the others.
> This is reflected in our law that the eldest son inherits much more of his father's land and cattle than all his younger brothers together. Much more than all the other sons he is the father. So when an eldest son dies without leaving a son, this means a great loss of boranaship for the whole lineage. It is irreplaceable. The eldest son of a younger brother has the degree of boranaship of his father which is always much less than his eldest brother had (or his eldest brother's eldest son). The more remote a borana-lineage is from the lineage of the eldest sons, the weaker the borana's ayana is in them.
> Another way along which boranaship decreases in a lineage is marriage – marriage with a gabaro woman or a slave. The children of such liaisons have only a little boranaship left, but those of a gabaro mother have somewhat more. You must not look

at what these degraded borana say of themselves, you must look at what people say of them in their absence. They regard them practically as gabaro; the borana especially do this.
Hence the boundary between borana and gabaro is not clear-cut Boranaship grows less and less, and in the end so little is left that it is no longer worthwhile.
In our country the purity of descent in even the highest borana lineages is questionable. My own grandfather who was elected my people's ritual leader of their gada, was a son of a Mao mother."

The borana's purity of descent, then, is to a certain extent a fiction. Borana are also partly created by the people – a people in need of a link with the pure beginning. They consciously overlook factors of impure descent and of a lower place on the genealogical tree for the sake of having a socio-religious group among them who link them to the perfect life of their people – nearer to Waqa – as it was when they were born from the Walabo lake in the far east long ago.

As Gammachu phrased it after he had read this chapter:

"Our people want the ayana of their borana to be still perfectly one with the ayana of their first ancestors through whom they are united to Waqa."

Chapter 17

THE GABARO

Borana sagal gabaro sagaltami
Nine are the borana, ninety the gabaro

Though this is only a saying and as such not to be taken literally, the proportion in numbers comes fairly near to the real situation in western Matchaland in bygone times.

But as a borana made clear to me: "It is not needed that there are many borana." Indeed, provided there are at least a sufficient number of them to act as channels of blessing for their people in all fields of life.

That there are differences in status between them and the gabaro has become abundantly clear in the previous chapter. In all things the borana had to 'open the way' for the rest of the people and this obligation of theirs was expressed in many ways. Here, I would like to bring to the fore some elements of equality.

1. Features of equality

First of all: both borana and gabaro were 'free people' (*birmada*) in contrast to the slaves, and they could marry each other.

> "There are no different laws for borana and gabaro. When they went up the Mao mountain, every eighth year, to proclaim the law anew, borana and gabaro sat together; only the elder clans [consisting of borana and gabaro] were sitting higher up the slope.
> Two men would proclaim the law again. One of them had to be a borana, the other a gabaro. They were standing facing one another; one was standing to the east, the other to the west. The former had to be a borana. It was also the borana who had to start the ritual with his blessing.
> While borana and gabaro are praying together, the gabaro are standing in the midst and the borana on both sides."
>
> (Ambassa Waqo)
>
> [Thus expressing that the gabaro were always shielded by the borana.]

"There is no difference between gabaro and borana in regard to marriage regulations. Neither of them may marry a girl with whom they have a grandfather in common until the ninth generation [on the father's side]." (Waquma Tollera)

Another example of equality was to be found in the ritual stick (*dhaabbata*) a son used to receive from his father on his wedding-day. It was a symbol of the new twig he was about to start on the genealogical tree. Accordingly, it had to be of the same kind of wood as his father's ritual stick. The wood had to be fragant, termite-proof and it had to be perfectly straight – all of them symbols of its owner as a man who has good relations with other people and is respected by them, a strong man, too, (resistant) and a man whose life would be 'straight' and steadily 'going upwards'.

Since the stick was a symbol of the genealogical tree, it would have been natural that its quality had been different according to pure or less pure descent. In fact, however, this was not the case. Whether the groom was a borana or a gabaro, his ritual stick was always of the same wood, *urgesa.* The only difference was that a gabaro father had to cut his son's stick on a place near the river more downstream than a borana father. (I am pretty sure that he did not, unless a borana happened to be around to curse him.)

Under the surface of this seeming equality, we may well presume an age-old struggle on the gabaro's part to blur out the differences as far as possible. There is no doubt they were deeply convinced that they could not do without the borana in view of their relations with Waqa, but, on the other hand, the borana needed the gabaro badly in everyday life, and besides the gabaro outnumbered the borana many times over.

2. The gabaro as a group. Some more characteristics

We saw in the previous chapter that the boundary between borana and gabaro is rather vague and fluctuating. It was clear, however, that, at least for part of them, boranaship (*boranumma*) was linked up with a sharing of the same ayana, the ayana of the borana.

With the other gabaro things are different. Though they cannot but accept an ayana, common to all of them as a social group, the idea does not seem to appeal much to them. Probably they are too keenly aware of the differences in descent among them.

"It could also be explained by the fact that the gabaro's ayana is that much inferior to the borana's, that in everyday life this inferior ayana is experienced as rather ineffective. The borana are the eldest ones. The eldest brother's ayana protects and helps his younger brothers, whose ayana are much weaker than his. The borana is pure, the gabaro not so. The borana can bless and curse, the gabaro cannot.
So the borana's ayana permanently overshadows the ayana of the gabaro, not to say a word of the ayana of slaves set free and the ayana of those who, without passing through slavery, have been integrated into Oromo society." (Gammachu Magarsa)

3. Where do the gabaro come from?

a. A first answer

It is given by Waquma Tollera in an interview with his son Ensermu:

Ens.: "Where do the gabaro come from?"
WT.: "Gabaro and borana are all of them children of Raya (the first ancestor of all Oromo according to Matcha tradition). The borana are the eldest sons; the gabaro are his younger sons. The difference between them is that the borana can bless and curse, while the gabaro can not."
Ens.: "Perhaps the gabaro became weak because they mixed with slaves."
WT.: "The reason is that the younger sons of Raya started eating sheep and the forelegs of animals. They broke the law."

Waquma Tollera's answer only deals with degraded borana: it stresses common descent for borana and gabaro and confirms the words of Gammachu Magarsa (Chap. 16:12) about the pre-eminence of the lineage of eldest sons.

b. A second answer

"When we took possession of the land, we made the people who were living there, gabaro."

Indeed, they did not make all of them slaves. We find to the west of Dembidollo an Oromo clan called 'Waqalale' (or Waqilale). The name

means literally 'I looked at Waqa' but could be translated 'For Waqa's sake'.

It is a composite clan, consisting of non-Oromo like the Anuak and Hadiya (a people in the east of S.Ethiopia). Dinsa Sarba, a reliable informant and himself a Waqalale, told us:

> "Five Yambo [Anuak] men had killed other people. They fled from their country and stayed with us. They formed a group under protection of the Amumma clan [Matcha], married Amumma girls and were called Waqalale."

Dinsa Sarba himself was a Hadiya: "I myself am a Hadiya. We Hadiya do not eat sheep. We are a little like the borana."

So with these non-Oromo peoples brought together into such an artificial 'Oromo' clan we still found, until recently, old traditions of their own. In order not to fall victim to other Oromo clans, a composite clan like the Waqalale needed the protection of a real Matcha clan like the Amumma.

From the foregoing it also becomes understandable why the Waqalale were a clan without borana. All my informants were unanimous in asserting that the Waqalale had become gabaro without ever going through a period of slavery.

Note

It is interesting to note that the Oromo know more of such composite clans, also called 'Waqalale'. My assistant Gammachu Magarsa also found such a clan among the Arsi Oromo in the east, of whom he says that they were also called 'Hadiya' and that they were said to be borana (probably because they did not eat sheep).

c. A third answer

"Also a slave who was set free, became gabaro."

He, too, needed the protection of a Matcha clan who could revenge the shedding of his blood in case he was killed by others.

> "From now onwards, he is no slave anymore. He is more than a slave: he is free. But he is not an Oromo. I think he is now 'a little gabaro'." (Dinsa Sarba)

Remark

After reading these answers Gammachu Magarsa commented:

> "There are many other reasons by which people try to explain the differences between gabaro and borana on the one hand and those between the gabaro themselves. Many aspects of our people's life are not referred to in these answers."

We still see nowadays how individual people of other ethnic groups insert themselves informally and on their own account into a Matcha clan. They settle among them, assume an Oromo name and call a befriended Matcha their father. Whenever they are likely to be believed, they give as their genealogy that of their Oromo father.

Chapter 18

SLAVES

Before the abolition of slavery in the nineteen-thirties, slaves constituted the lowest social stratum in Matcha society. We still find a number of former slaves in the Dembidollo area. Some of these people are still called by their slave-names (non-Oromo names or a name like 'Slave of N.N.') by the people of their neighbourhood.

1. Three kinds of slaves

a. The garbota

The word *'garbota'* is the plural of *'garba*-slave'. They represented the first stage and the lowest grade of slavery. In western Matchaland the name was reserved for those slaves who had been bought. Garbota could never pass on their own name to their children. The latter were simply called 'Slave of N.N.'. Their master could sell them again and even freely dispose of their lives. Normally, however, mutual relations tended to be rather paternalistic.

b. The manbate

The name is formed from *'mana*-house' and the verb *'bau*-go out'. Literally translated it means 'she left the house' (the female gender of the verb indicates contempt).

> "The *manbate* were slaves who no longer like the garbota, were living in their master's house or huts, but had been allowed to marry and to have a house of their own within the master's compound. During day-time, they would work and eat together with the garbota, but they would spend the night in their own house. Their children would be slaves like their parents but would bear their father's name. Such manbate could earn some money on their own account. With this money they could buy their freedom later on. First, however, they had to buy another slave in their place." (Dinsa Sarba)

c. Yabata

Gammachu Magarsa:

> "In contrast to the garbota who had been bought, the *yabata* were prisoners taken in war or on a raid. As such they were given somewhat more honour, but, for the rest, they had to serve their master in the same way as the garbota or manbate. We connect the name yabata with the verb *yabachu* = to mount, a verb we use for mounting a horse or a mule. Their master could mount them as he mounted his horse, forcing them to go wherever he wanted and to go as quickly he wanted them to go. A slave-woman or slave-girl who was not a manbate could be 'mounted' by her master or his sons as they pleased, but always keeping in mind our law that a son never would have sexual intercourse with the same woman or girl as his father."

2. Freed slaves

What it meant for a slave to be set free and what it meant for the others, is best illustrated by the ceremony of the setting free of a slave and by the people's comments on it.

The ceremony in question was called *'lubabasu'*. The second part of this word, *'basu'* means 'to free, to set free'. The first part *'luba'* means 'service'. In this sense it is used both for the service of a slave and for the service of free men on behalf of their people i. e. for the successive responsabilities taken by a man in the frame of the *gada*-system. A man who had fulfilled all these responsabilities was called *'lubabaesa'* or simply *'luba'*. The plural of the latter word is *'lubota'*. In this ceremony we will see them act as ritual leaders.

After their ruling period was finished the lubota continued to act as ritual leaders in all rituals where the relations between clans and lineages were concerned. They could be either borana or gabaro. These lubota usually were of two kinds. First, men who distinguished themselves among their equals (other lubota) by wisdom and by the fact that they had been visibly blessed by Waqa in their lives. As such they had a rather priestly function.

> [Onesimus Nesib or, as the Oromo call him Abba Gammachisa, who made the first bible translation in Oromo language (an indefatigable searcher for the right

word) uses the word 'lubota' for the Jewish priests (linguistically the words 'lubota' and 'levites' are cognate).]

Second, there were others, rather experts in law. They could well be gabaro who, in this way, ensured for themselves a higher place in society.

It was custom that also the gada group in power was represented by prospective lubota. "They would be there in order to learn."

Here now follows the ceremony. I owe this record to Shagerdi Bukko and Waquma Tollera.

> "When a slave wanted to purchase his freedom, he could do so, but he had to give another slave to take his place. The whole lineage had to agree with it, since the slave would become one of them.
> Before the ritual proper started, the *kallacha* could be used in order to stress the slave's request.
> After all these things had been settled, the master had prepared much beer and honeywine. The lubota always came the day before. On that day people would dam up a nearby river so that there was much water. Then they would take the slave to this place, shouting: 'Who will take care of you?' To which the slave replied: 'Your dhaabbata (praying-stick, a symbol of the lineage), your *utuba* (supporting pole of the house, also a symbol of the master) and Waqa will take care of me.'
> While shouting this way, they pushed him towards the river using their spears. He dropped into the river and they washed him with their feet, shouting: 'Kill him. Leave him there. Let the vultures eat him!'
>
> [The ritual expressed that he could not live without the protection of his master and the latter's lineage; that being set free would mean his death. The very time of the day is part of the symbolism: the day is dying.
> His emergence from the water anticipates his rebirth as a free man, but this rebirth will not take place until early morning, when the day is still young.]
>
> After this they went back to the house, dancing and singing their killers' songs.

[These songs are the triumphsongs of the killers of big game. In former times such killers' songs could also mention manslaughter. Since the slaves normally were non-Oromo the mentioning of the killing of a Mao or Anuak would fit the ritual.]

The older men would pass the night eating, drinking and sleeping and they would also speak about the laws of our people in regard to freeing of slaves. Early next morning they would beat the law."

This 'beating' of the law here (they used a whip) is a simplified version of the solemn proclamation of Matcha law every eighth year by the *gada*-set assuming power. As on that occasion, here, too, the 'beating' of the law is done as the day approaches.

"Two lubota took their stand in front of the house, facing one another. One of them, a borana, would stand to the east facing the west, and the other, a gabaro, would stand to the west facing the east. The master of the slave would give his own praying-stick to the borana who, however, would keep it in his left hand, since it was not his own stick. The gabaro would keep another stick. The gabaro would start:
(1 = borana, 2 = gabaro. The gabaro invites the borana, the people of the morning-light, to bless.)

2. Kottu.	Come.
1. Dhufe.	I have come.
2. Aka ati dhufte nagan biya hadhufu.	In the same way you came, may peace come to the country (people).
1. HADHUFU.	MAY IT COME.
	(All those present confirm the gabaro's words. From now onwards they join in his answers.)
1. Waqni kan bokka hatau.	May Waqa give us plenty of rain.
2. HATAU.	MAY HE GIVE US (PLENTY OF RAIN).
1. Lafti kan marga hatau.	May the earth give plenty of grass.

2. HATAU.	MAY SHE GIVE (PLENTY OF GRASS).
1. Margi kan sawa hatau.	May the grass remain with the cattle.
2. HATAU.	MAY IT REMAIN (WITH THE CATTLE).
1. Sawi kan abba hatau.	May the cattle remain with their owners.
2. HATAU.	MAY THEY REMAIN (WITH THEIR OWNERS).
1. Malkaan kan boru hatau.	May the drinking place remain muddy.
2. HATAU.	MAY IT REMAIN (MUDDY). [Owing to the great number of cattle.]
1. Namni wolli naga hatau.	May people be in peace with one another.
2. HATAU.	MAY THEY BE (IN PEACE).
1. Waqni namaan naga hatau.	May Waqa be in peace with men.
2. HATAU.	MAY HE BE (IN PEACE WITH MEN). [Mutual peace is a condition for Waqa's blessing.]

Once these general blessings have been pronounced (others could be added) the two men pass on to the proclamation of the *saffu*.

[Saffu is a fundamental and all-pervading concept in the Matcha's life. It implies that all things have a place of their own in the cosmic and social order, and that they should keep this place. Their place is conditioned by the specific ayana each of them has received from Waqa. Every creature, and especially man, has to act according to its own ayana and to respect the others' ayana. Saffu implies both rights and duties. In the people's eyes wisdom is "knowing saffu and abide by it".]

1. Saffun jiraka.	There is saffu.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THERE IS SAFFU INDEED.
1. Ilmi abbaan wolli saffudhaka.	Son and father are saffu to one another.

2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU INDEED.
1. Hintalif hati wolli saffudhaka.	Daughter and mother are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU (TO ONE ANOTHER) INDEED.
1. Garbichif goftaan wolli saffudhaka.	Slave and master are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU (TO ONE ANOTHER) INDEED.
1. Garbittinif giftin wolli saffudhaka.	Slave-maid and mistress are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU (TO ONE ANOTHER) INDEED.
1. Hangaftif kutisun wolli saffudhaka.	The eldest brother and the younger one are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU (TO ONE ANOTHER) INDEED.
1. Bishaanif sawi wolli saffudhaka.	Water and cattle are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU (TO ONE ANOTHER) INDEED.
1. Guddanif thinnon wolli saffudhaka.	Big and small are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU (TO ONE ANOTHER) INDEED.
1. Qoraatif fani wolli saffudhaka.	Thorns and foot-soles are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU (TO ONE ANOTHER) INDEED.
1. Gufunif qubni milaa wolli saffudhaka.	Tree-stumps and toes are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU (TO ONE ANOTHER) INDEED.
1. Daaraanif dakun wolli saffudhaka.	Ashes and dough are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU (TO ONE ANOTHER) INDEED.
	[The list could be extended at pleasure.]
1. Saffun kun kan mali?	Whose saffu is this?

2. SAFFUN KUN KAN WAQAF KAN LAFATI. — IT IS THE SAFFU OF WAQA AND THE EARTH.

[According to the Matcha the saffu was given to them by Waqa and the earth from the very beginning, prior to their gada-laws 'which they took from men' as they say themselves. These gada-laws, in their turn, were no more than a man-made shrine for their saffu.
At the solemn proclamation of these laws, every eighth year, the proclamation of the saffu preceded that of the gada-laws with a ritual all of its own (see chapter 27).

Accordingly, here too, its proclamation is followed by the gada-law, the 'law of Makko Billi', as far as it has bearing on the ceremony in question. This law is 'beaten' with a whip, made of the strongest material possible, hippopotamus-skin, a symbol of the law itself. It handled by the second man who is often an expert in law, if not a former gada-judge (foye).
The hippopotamus is also associated with water as a source of life.]

1. Seri Makko Billi jiraka. — There is a law of Makko Billi.
2. EYE, JIRAKA. — YES, THERE IS INDEED.
1. Garbichi birmadummasa hinbittataka. — A slave can buy his freedom.
2. EYE, HINBITATAKA. — YES, HE CAN (BUY HIS FREEDOM).
1. Iddosa garbicha bira busaka. — He shall give another slave in his place.
2. EYE, BUSAKA. — YES, HE SHALL GIVE (ANOTHER SLAVE).
1. Goftaansa maqa birmada kennafka. — His master shall give him the name of a free man.
2. EYE, KENNAFKA. — YES, HE SHALL GIVE HIM (SUCH A NAME).
1. Dhaabbata murrafka. — He shall cut a ritual stick for him.
2. EYE, MURRAFKA. — YES, HE SHALL CUT (IT) FOR HIM.

1. Garbichichi qomo goftasatirra lakaamaka.	The slave shall be attached to his master's clan.
2. EYE, LAKAAMAKA.	YES, HE SHALL BE ATTACHED (TO IT).
1. Lafa goftasatirra jirataka.	He shall live on his master's land.
2. EYE, JIRATAKA.	YES, HE SHALL LIVE (THERE).
1. Goftaansa lafa qodafka.	His master shall offer him a piece of his land.
2. EYE, QODAFKA.	YES, HE SHALL OFFER HIM (A PIECE OF HIS LAND).
1. Garbichichi goftasatif ammayu hinergamaka.	The slave shall continue working for his master.
2. EYE, HINERGAMAKA.	YES, HE SHALL CONTINUE DOING SO.
1. Guma goftasati hinbasaka.	He shall take part in his master's blood-feuds.
2. EYE, HINBASAKA.	YES, HE SHALL TAKE PART IN THEM.
1. Goftaan guma garbichasa hinbasaka.	The master shall take part in his slave's blood-feuds.
2. EYE, HINBASAKA.	YES, HE SHALL TAKE PART IN THEM.
1. Kun tuma Makko Billitika.	Such is the 'beating' (law) of Makko Billi.
2. EYE, KUN TUMA MAKKO BILLITIKA.	YES, SUCH IS THE 'BEATING' OF MAKKO BILLI.

At this the second man cracks his whip.

After they have beaten the law, the slave comes in with the new slave he has bought for his master. If he wants to be freed together with his wife, he brings also a slave-maid.

While he does so, his master is sitting in the backroom together with the lubota. Two of them are the main leaders of the ritual. The slave himself cannot enter the backroom; he has to stay in the frontroom.

Now they call him: 'Come.'

The slave approaches the threshold of the backroom and remains standing there. The master and the lubota ask him: 'Will you continue to live on your master's land?' – 'Yes, I will stay on

my master's land,' he says. 'Will you fight his blood-feud?' – 'Yes, I will do so,' he says.
In this way they ask him all the things he must do when he is free. In the end they say: 'If you fail to do these things, will you return to slavery?' – 'Yes, if I fail to do this, let me return to slavery,' he says. At that they say to him: 'Go back to your place.' And the slave retires.

[Another formula is: "Go back down under the knees" (your master's knees) which implies that the slave has to go back to his place as a slave where he cannot claim descent (for all its being only a nominal one) from his master. A son is born "from his father's knees".]

The master now addresses his slave: "My son, in the past I did not pierce you with my spear (though I had a right to kill you); in the future I will not even hit you with its lower end. If somebody kills you, I will kill your murderer. If you kill another person, I will help you to buy yourself off. I am going to set you free now. Accept this ritual stick from my hands." (See chapter 17:1)
At that he hands him a short ritual stick and adds: "From now onwards your name will be 'Urgesa' (an Oromo name)."

[The stick is only short – a symbol that the slave's social position, 'his life' as people say, must not 'grow high' after he has been set free.]

Before doing so, the master has also handed two short sticks to the lubota who are sitting near him. While doing so, he tells them: 'Keep them low. Keep them under your knees. Don't make them touch the ground.'

[The two short sticks are (like the praying-stick) a symbol of the slave. They must not get a chance of taking roots. The slave must never be more than a slave set free.]

But the slave may say: 'Keep them somewhat higher' or 'Make them touch the ground'.
At this, one of the lubota may say to the master: 'You have set him free. His *buqe* will not turn back.'

[The *buqe* is a kind of pumpkin which is found near all houses and is part of the kitchen-garden. It creeps very far. The *buqe* is a symbol of fertility. The luba wants to say: "You have set him free; he will multiply. You cannot help that."]

Then one of the lubota will ask the master: 'What plot of land are you going to give him?' The master says: 'I will give him the land at the left side of my field where it borders N.N.'s land, from the river upwards the hill as far as the place where the sycomore with the low branches is standing.'

[Thus the plot is precisely defined.]

After all these things have been done, they say to the slave: 'Come in, Urgesa,' and the slave enters the backroom. His master and the lubota are sitting there with the *dhaaba* in front of them.

[The *dhaaba* are two clay-jars filled with beer, a large and a small one (mother and child). Between them, and touching both of them, stands a little wooden container with *buna qala,* coffee-fruits stewed in butter. Together they form a symbol of fertility. *Dhaaba* are never lacking at any domestic ritual. While the older men are sitting behind these *dhaaba,* the slave is standing in front, the *dhaaba* standing between them.]

Now the slave repeats all his promises. This time it is done above the *dhaaba.* After this they all drink from the *dhaaba.*
Now an ox is slaughtered in front of the house and eating and drinking begins. Strips of the oxe's hide are given to people, but the slave is given only a short strip."

[This short strip which is put at the right wrist is a symbol of his modest position in the clan. Indeed, he is not even a full gabaro. He will be called 'gabaro' but his non-Oromo descent is never forgotten and will be unearthed as soon as a marriage is at stake or in case he fails to remember his low descent.]

Here follows some further comment by Waquma Tollera in an interview with his son, Ensermu.

Ens.: "A man can set his slave free, but what about that man's sons? Can't they take back some of the land their father has given to his slave?"
WT.: "They must not change the boundaries of that land. They must protect the former slave as their father did. If they fail to do so their hands will take leprosy."
Ens.: "Take a man who likes his slave very much and does not want him to give a slave in his place."
WT.: "Such a thing does not happen. He never will be a free man, if he does not pay. But even when he has given another slave in his place, people will continue to say of him that once he was set free by such and such. Even if he grows rich, they will still say so."
Ens.: "You told me that the master says to the lubota: 'Keep your sticks well down your knees and don't make them touch the ground.' What does he mean by this?"
WT.: "There are several meanings. When the stick touches the ground, the slave will take his master's land. When it touches the ground, it may take roots and grows many branches, and so will the slave do. If they lift the sticks above their knees, the slave will surpass his master's sons. Because of all these meanings, the master pays the lubota that they may act in the right way."
Ens.: "What about the slave? He, too, has money. He, too, can give the lubota money that they may touch the ground with their sticks and lift them above their knees."
WT.: "He does give money to them, indeed, in order to have them do so." [He laughs]
Ens.: "But, if they take money from both sides, how can they uphold the law?"
WT.: "While the master is looking at them, they keep the stick below their knees. When the slave is looking at them, they make it go up a little. It is still early in the morning and dark in the house, when they are doing this ceremony. Accordingly, the master says to the lubota: 'My friends, I am keeping my eye on you.' He will also take the sticks away from their hand, before they can lift them above their knees, at the end of the ceremony."

Ens.: "Did you ever see what happened to slaves who were set free and to the masters who set them free?"
WT.: "In the long run, it is not good for the masters; their former slaves will, in the end, surpass the master's grandchildren. The slave becomes a tree with many branches and the master's grandchildren will sit under that tree."
Ens.: "Why then do they set him free?"
WT.: "There are slaves who earn some money by themselves and then refuse to be slaves anymore. The master wants to get rid of them and to have another slave in their place. So he has them buy a new slave. In this way he gets the money back he paid for them."
Ens.: "What about if the slave is married? Has he to give also a female slave for his wife?"
WT.: "Yes, he has to. Otherwise his children will not be free, since their mother is still a slave."

3. *The need for protection*

Like the *qollu* the slave, too, needed to be nominally attached to his former master's lineage. So he became, at least nominally, 'one blood' with them. The lineage took the obligation to revenge his blood in case he was killed, though the blood-price for such a freed slave was rather low. The slave, on his part, was naturally eager to act as if he were really of one and the same blood with the lineage and to 'fight' his former master's blood-feuds (*guma*). He also would forget his own ancestors in favour of his master's.

> "I never heard of former slaves who started a lineage of their own within their master's clan." (Gammachu Magarsa)

But his real descent was never forgotten.

4. *The survival of ancient values*

Until the present day, the traditional values with regard to descent are still much alive, despite all social change. They are still uphold in the institutional insult-songs addressed to the groom, when he comes to collect his bride, or – in case of elopement – when he comes to make peace with her parents. They are sung by his bride's girl-friends.

Before he is allowed to enter the house, he has to wait for some time in front of it and to listen to the insults of these girls who protract their songs as long as he is in the house.

The ancient views of slavery also still come to the fore in proverbs and riddles.

a. Insult-songs

Since we have to do here with institutional insult, the words of these songs don't need of necessity to reflect the truth in regard to the boy in question.

1. Aǹ wadésa 'nyábu,
   óbbolésa móye.

   [Mortars are made of wadesa wood. In addition, they are symbols of sexual intercourse.]

   Aǹ dabésa 'njálu,
   óbbolésakóle.

I do not climb a wadesa tree,
brother of the mortar.

I do not like a coward,
even if he were my brother.

2. Ólun nú 'nfutú.

   Yóna nú futé,
   hómma nú 'ndhaantú.

   [It is accepted by both partners that a man beats his wife from time to time. It implies that a wife of character does not yield to her husband, and that a man who never beats his wife is considered as a weakling, also by his own wife.
   As a woman phrased it: "When my husband did not beat me for some time, I start rubbing my back against the *utuba* (centre-pole, a symbol of the master of the house)." In other words, I start challenging him.]

   Gárbichá kenyá,
   kán abbaán bité,
   gárba jénnaní.

An undeveloped man will not marry us.

If he marries us,
he will (not be able to) beat us.

He is our slave,
bought by my father,
and 'slave' we will call him.

3. Ádden sí 'nmallé
   kán mudhíǹ tchallé,
   bírraan sábbatá.

The girl who does not marry you
wears beads from shoulder to waist,
and besides (she wears) a belt.

[These beads are symbols of her mother's ayana who protects her virginity before marriage and guarantees her fertility after.
The belt is a symbol of continence in general and of the girl's virginity in particular.]

Iśhen sĭ malté — The girl who marries you
gárbittĭ abbayé, — is our father's slave-maid,
kán nudhĭn jawé, — with a python from shoulder to waist,
bĭrraan márattá. — and besides this a black snake.

[The boy should marry a slave-maid, since he is a slave himself; a slave-maid who has been everyone's maid, unprotected by the ayana of an Oromo mother. Instead of beads and a belt she wears snakes around her waist, symbols of sexual intercourse.]

4. Gámmadá gurbá — This boy Gammada

[The word *gurba* = boy is intended here to remind the audience of the word *garba* = slave.]

fúli fókisá, — with his ugly face,
mĭdhagúf kolfá: — when he laughs, he looks nice:
ĭlal kárrusá. — look at his *karru*.

[*Karru* = opening between the upper cutting-teeth, held to be beautiful.]

Dúr horrĭ abbakó — Once he was my father's slave,
Gámmadá gurbá. — this boy Gammada.
Dháq' godó tchisĭ; — Go and sleep in the (slaves') hut;
áchi iddón garbáa. — that's the place for slaves.

5. Ijakó ilalĭ — Look at my eyes,
ĭja bóranáa, — eyes of a borana,
bóru dárbatá. — beaming forth pure morning light.

[The light of the pure beginning of our people.]

Ijaké ilalĭ, — Look at your eyes,
ĭja yábatáa. — eyes of a yabata (slave),
tchĭmma dárbatá. — sticky with discharge.

[Your descent is neither clean nor clear.]

b. Proverbs

1. *Barreni mana hundesati.*
   The beauty of a house (family) lies in its roots (descent).

2. *Waen garbaa qoraani.*
   The work of a slave is collecting firewood. (Meaning: do not meddle with things above you.)

3. *Garbitti lubbuf katu, ollaan jabina sea.*
   When a slave-maid works through necessity, the neighbour thinks: she is not work-shy. (Meaning: Don't think easily that a slave works hard of his own free will.)

4. *Garbittin gargarsa argatte maji dhoksiti.*
   A slave-maid who gets help, hides the little grindstone. (Grinding between two stones was the work of slaves. The meaning is: don't be too lenient towards a slave-maid, otherwise she stops working and prevents other slaves from doing so.)

5. *Garbittinif giftin wolli saffudha.*
   Slave-maid and mistress are saffu to one another. (Meaning: they should know their place with regard to one another.)

6. *Garbichi quufe gombisa goftaa dhita.*
   A slave who ate his fill, kicks his master's granary.

7. *"Dur si 'nqabaa?" jedhe garbichi, dadhi booka balaqamee.*
   "Did I have you before?" said the slave and he vomited the best honeywine. (Meaning: What suits the master should not be given to or taken by the slave. An application of the rule: slave and master are saffu to one another.)

c. Riddles

1. *Amalaan gifti, bifaan garbitti.*
   As for her demanour a mistress, as for her colour a slave-maid.
   Answer: *Gura* seeds. They are black but delicious as spices.

2. *Garbitti gurrattin fula goftaa dura ijajite finchofti.*
   A black slave-maid stands in front of her master and passes urine.
   Answer: A blackened coffee-pot.

A dark complexion is always traced to descent from 'Shankila', earlier peoples whom the Oromo made their slaves. Not only the dark complexion but also the laziness of slaves are proverbial.

Chapter 19

DESPISED CASTES OF ARTISANS

The Matcha recognize two despised castes of artisans: *tumtu* and *faqi.* Their social position was of old below the gabaro but above the slaves.

Tumtu, 'beaters' (from the verb *'tumu* – to beat'), are first of all the blacksmiths, but the weavers are also called *'tumtu'* in everyday speech. *Faqi* are the tanners. The word is Amharic and means 'scraper'. The old Oromo word *'duugdu'* is not used anymore in the area, though the verb *'duugu'* is.

1. Their trades

a. Blacksmiths

They provide people with spears and ploughpoints, choppers, sickles, and axes of various kinds. In addition, they make the iron parts of harnesses for horses and mules, and bracelets and anklets for the women.

I never saw any decoration worth mentioning on these artifacts, though most blacksmiths 'sign' their pieces with a few dots and lines.

Blacksmiths normally do not make complete spears or choppers. The purchasers are supposed to provide themselves the wooden handles. As it runs in a song:

Utún tumtú taé, tumtú Dhaé taé, somá ebó 'ntolchú, qaráf jinfú malé.	If I were a tumtu, a tumtu of Dhae, I would not make the spear-shaft, but only the point and the jinfu. [Dhae: a lineage of the Doyu clan. Jinfu: an iron spiral at the opposite end of the point which reinforces the shaft where it comes in touch with stones.]
Halalé durbáa tumtú, ya 'ka 'shén bifá toltú; hingabábaté malé!	Attractiveness of tumtu girls, oh, how good-looking they are; if only they were not so short! ['Halale' has strong sexual connotations. 'Short' here does not point so much at their being undersized than at their low position in society.]

b. Tanners

In former times, they made shields and provided people, and particularly the women and girls, with skin clothing.

The Dutch traveller, J.M. Schuver, who saw these dresses in the northern part of western Matchaland in 1881, was surprised by their high quality.

He wrote: "The women dress themselves in skirts of calf- and goatskin of a marvellous smoothness." (1883:25)

The girls' dresses were preferably made of calf-skin, since 'girls are calves' (not of goatskin, since goats are a symbol of sexual dissoluteness). The women's dresses were also sometimes made of cowhide (hides of *fertile* cows) since women are commonly compared with cows.[28]

Nowadays, they still make the leather parts of harnesses for horses and mules, sleeping-skins, whips, and sheets for spears and knives. In present-day songs (many of these songs are rather old) the ancient skin-dresses are still mentioned.

Thus in this praise-song of the cattle:

Sáwa sáwiléko	Cows, o my cows,
bĭrraan wátiléko!	and also you, my calves!
Sáwa ésa jĭbu?	What part of our cattle is useless?
Sáwa qénsa qĭchu.	Our cattle with soft hoofs.
Kótten shĭni táe;	Their hoofs become shini (small drinking cups);
gógaan wállu táe;	their skins become wallu (a woman's dress in former times);
fón irbáta táe.	their meat becomes our evening meal.

And in a girl's song:

Wán sadĭn jaalá:	Three things I like:
tóko hármekóti,	my mother,
tóko qárrekóti,	my *qarre* (tonsure of girls, a symbol of virginity),
tóko kállekóti.	and my *kalle* (skin-dress).

[28] The Matcha don't see anything derogatory in these comparisons. Leather strips to carry the babies are still seen in other parts of Oromoland.

c. Weavers

Chiefly they make so-called *'shamma'*, wide shawls, 1.5 – 2 meters each way, which form the most distinctive part of the national Ethiopian dress. The thread is spun by their daughters and wives.

That weavers, too, are called 'tumtu' comes to the fore in this love-song:

Yá tumtú, wayá dha'ĭ,
wálakán kuulá hataú.
Achitú nagá ta'ĭ;

wál argáan sutá hataú.

Oh tumtu, weave clothes,
and let the kuula be in the midst.
As for you (my love) stay in peace up there;
let it take some time before we see one another again.

[The singer here speaks of special kind of shamma, called 'waqaalo', which is only worn by women past child-bearing. This shamma, a wide shawl, is thicker than other ones; it is white like the others but through the midst runs a wide red band, called 'kuula'.

To the lovers such a waqaalo is a symbol of two contrasts in their life: like the fabric of the waqaalo the fabric of life brings both separation and unity. The very red band that separates the waqaalo's white parts, keeps them also together. Their very separation makes their love only deeper and more beautiful.

As far as the wish 'stay in peace' is concerned, we should remember that 'peace' not only stands for peace with other people but also for good health, and being free from trouble – in short, for God's blessing in general. As long as this peace lasts, as long as the two white parts remain perfect and undisturbed, the waqaalo of their love is fine.

Besides, the very use of the waqaalo guarantees that the two white parts will meet one another again, i.e. whenever the woman wraps herself up in her shawl. So the lovers have only to wait patiently until this happens.]

Professional weavers belong, together with the blacksmiths, to the despised caste of the tumtu. They are from old subject to the same taboos regarding marriage, participation in the ruling of Matcha society a.s.o. However, in one aspect they differ from the blacksmiths and tanners: their trade itself is not considered as less honorable. Weaving is also practised by other Oromo. We will come back to this later. So, if in the quotations given below reference is made by the informants to 'the tumtu's trade' as something despicable, they have only forging in mind.

N.B. It is noteworthy that wood-workers and potters do not belong to the despised castes.

2. Their traditional position in society

What people say themselves about the *tumtu* and *faqi.*

> "*Tumtu* and *faqi* live together, apart from each other and from us. The faqi always live near a river, since they need water for their work.
> We have a saying about the faqi: '*Obbolesa laga gamarra faqi olla ofi waya* – Better to have a faqi as neighbour (despite the stench) than a brother on the other side of the river.' We also have another saying: '*Faqin yero duuga dadhabdu, sarre arisa kati* – When a faqi has grown tired from scraping, he runs after the dogs' (the gender of the verb is female – an indication of contempt).
> Scraping skins is hard work, and there are always dogs around who want to pick up the meat from the skins. This saying is used for people who do not want to work and always find a reason to withdraw from it.
> Another saying is: '*Jerri kuni tumtu faqidha* – These people are like tumtu and faqi', they do not like one another.
> Faqi are higher than tumtu, since their work is wet and the tumtu's is dry.
> We do not marry with tumtu or faqi. Honestly speaking, as far as the tumtu girls are concerned this is a pity in a way. Their girls are the handsomest of all.
> In former times, when a tumtu man slept with a gabaro or borana woman, the punishment was as follows: half of the woman's hair was cut off on the left side and half of her clothes were cut

off on the left side so far up as her thighs, and they did not eat or drink with her anymore. She was thrown out. It was a harsh law. The man had to pay a fine in cattle." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

[The symbolism of the punishment is that the woman has allowed somebody to 'enter' her husband's lineage 'from the left (wrong) side', which means in this case that she allowed a tumtu to do so.]

"People said: 'That woman had brought bad blood into our clan. Therefore, they sent her away from the country. Her own husband, however, could go with her. If he did not want to do so, people collected money for him to take another wife."

(Dinsa Sarba)

"Tumtu do not marry faqi. As a result, tumtu can only marry tumtu and faqi can only marry faqi. But, since they are few, they do not count seven grandfathers as we do, but only three or four on the father's side and two on the mother's side.

[A Matcha boy cannot marry a girl with whom he has the seventh grandfather in common on his father's side and the fifth on his mother's side.]

Each clan had its tumtu and faqi who were living on that clan's land. They could, however, not choose the land themselves: it was the borana who assigned the land to them. They did not have to pay for that land in any way.

If a tumtu or faqi had enough money to buy a new plot of land, he was not allowed to do so himself. He had to give the money to the borana who would buy it for him. The same held good when he wanted to sell some of his land.

Tumtu and faqi could not plough for themselves. If they did, the earth would grow dry. So the others ploughed for them, and the tumtu and faqi paid them with products of their trade.

Tumtu and faqi did not take part in peace negotiations. So if one of them was killed, it was the borana who took upon themselves his blood-vengeance and who negotiated about the blood-price. The blood-price for a tumtu or faqi was lower than for a borana or gabaro.

Neither were they allowed to speak in meetings on behalf of the

country, nor to partake in rituals together with borana and gabaro.
They could not go to war with us. Even nowadays we do not like taking them with us when we go out to kill buffaloes. It would bring us bad luck.
Nowadays, we work together with them in our fields, but our fathers did not. They believed that it would harm their crops. They would never enter a tumtu's or a faqi's house, and never allowed them to enter theirs. They never ate with them."

(Mirresa Gamtesa)

Another point of view was brought to the fore by the last ritual leader of the *gada* in the area, Ruda Kurra. When my assistant, his grandson Gammachu Magarsa, asked him: "Tell me, my grandfather, why don't we marry tumtu?" his answer was: "Those people know how to make tools of death. That's a dangerous skill, my grandson. Therefore we must keep them well under us."

Faqi and tumtu were allowed to imitate the way of life of the 'real Oromo', also in the ritual field. But their rituals were not considered to be of importance for the country's well-being at large, and any attempt on their part to put themselves on equal terms with the others was rebuked.

"Once a group of tanners asked the gabaro and borana to allow them to partake in their New Year celebration. To this effect they offered the elders clothes and other things made by them. The elders accepted their gifts and began to speak among themselves about the matter, while the faqi were awaiting their answer some distance away. The answer was: 'The faqi will not celebrate their New Year ritual [*masqal*] with us. Their bribes will not be returned to them.'
After this, they started their own *masqal* feast without the faqi."

(Mirresa Gamtesa)

In spite of all these things, there were also compromises. Ultimately faqi and tumtu constituted a precious possession to any clan. They were clan-members and in everyday life considered as Oromo.

"Tumtu and faqi were allowed to be members of the five *gada*-sets. True, they could not partake in the proclamation of the law; they must keep at a distance, though the faqi were permitted to come somewhat nearer than the tumtu.

All, however, would bring *kumbi* [myrrh] as an offering to the ayana of the tree under which the law was proclaimed anew. The others would accept their gift and put it under the tree.
When we go up the mountain to give thanks to Waqa for the good harvest; when we put there our beer and our *buna qala* (coffee-fruits stewed in butter) under the tree and slaughter a bull or a sheep, the tumtu and faqi cannot come with us. They must do all these things at the foot of the mountain. But they can pay for the sacrificial animal of the borana [a bull], and, in this case, the latter will bring them some of the sacrificial meat."
(Dinsa Sarba)

Shagerdi Bukko, an expert in the field of ritual, confirmed Dinsa Sarba's statement. When speaking about this extremely marginal participation of the artisans in the *gada*-rituals, the same Shagerdi Bukko said:

"Blacksmiths are not allowed to partake in the beating of the law, since they beat iron. If they would beat the law, people would start beating each other.
Weavers are always moving their hands. If they would beat the law, people would grow unstable and confused.
Tanners scrape skins. If they would beat the law, people would get a skin-disease and start scratching their skin."

There is certainly something of a joke here. Whenever Shagerdi brought these reasons to the fore, he was smiling. Probably the real reasons – at least in the Matcha's eyes – of their attitude against these artisans were best formulated by Gammachu Magarsa:

"The tumtu work on iron, and iron is dead and brings death.
The faqi dry the wet skins of our cattle and take the last life out of them.
It's therefore that we do not eat and drink with them, a degree of avoidance we do not even practice with slaves."

The following remarks of Gammachu shed a further light on the faqi's and, especially, the tumtu's place in Matcha society.

"To us there is a notable difference between tumtu and faqi. As I told you before: tumtu make something dead out of a lifeless thing, iron, but faqi take the last bit of life out of a living thing,

a cowhide. This is why we have a feeling that the faqi are more alien to us than the tumtu.

Our people needed both of them. We really wanted them to be there for all their doing things against saffu. You know, our fathers did not like to kill snakes. Once the wife of an American pastor killed a snake in the house. All Oromo women present started shouting, but in their hearts they were glad that the pastor's wife had shot that snake. They themselves never would have done so, not only because it was a snake but also because women are forbidden to shed blood. It is the same with the tumtu and faqi: they do things we ourselves cannot do, but things which need badly to be done. So you can understand why every clan wanted to have their own tumtu and faqi. They were really members of the clan and they themselves, too, claimed this membership.

On the other hand, the people's attitude against the tumtu and faqi is not everywhere the same. My wife's clan, the Ganka, for example, lay much more stress on the gap between themselves and their faqi than others. To express this they have a saying: 'We are like the two parts of a broken stone: we are severed from one another for ever.' Another thing you should not forget is that both tumtu and faqi had their own slaves, and that they had sexual intercourse with them just as we had ourselves.

Tumtu are intelligent people and they themselves are well aware of this. I had a tumtu friend of our clan. Whenever we were together on our land, he always sang about tumtu. There was pride in him. Just as there was pride in the tumtu on that day when the government forced people to make a road and the people themselves claimed that their tumtu would be dispensed from this work in order to be able to provide them with tools.

Another good friend of mine, also a tumtu, is now a mechanic with the Ethiopian Airlines. Once I heard him talking with an old man. He mentioned his present job, and the old man said smiling: 'So you continued your trade up there.'

More than the farmers the tumtu sent their children to school. So it is that a fair number of educated Oromo are tumtu.

Do you know that most of these tumtu who continued their trade on a higher level still remain strongly attached to their roots and go on calling themselves Oromo?

Oh, I would feel happy, if ever it could be proved that they were Oromo from the very beginning!"

5. Where do tumtu and faqi come from?

The Matcha themselves give different answers to this question.

a. They originated together with the people as a whole

This view is laid down in the mythical story of their birth as a people from the water.

> "When they crossed the Ghibe river, there were people among them who were carrying the tools of a blacksmith. They were smart, however. They asked others: 'Please, keep my tools for a moment; the water swallows me. And they gave their tools to the others. When these others had reached the far side, they found themselves with the tools of a blacksmith in their hands. They had become *tumtu.*"(Cf. Chap. 8)

This answer remains entirely within the mythical way of thought.

b. Tumtu and faqi came to us from other peoples

> "Did not our fathers tell us that tumtu and faqi were in this country already before us?" (An old man)

c. Some Matcha people became tumtu of their own free will

> "I know a tumtu who does not remember that his grandfather was a tumtu at all. Such a thing comes about in this way. Somebody is a tumtu and his neighbour, sitting near him, looks at his work. He wants to learn the trade also. So he does. People say of such a man that he has learned the trade 'by day-time' (i.e. he is not a tumtu by descent). His sons continue working iron. In this way they become tumtu.
> But most tumtu were already tumtu in their own country and joined the Oromo." (Bulcha Kurra)

> "Shifts from farming to forging or weaving are not something of modern times only.
> The farmers' economic situation was often deplorable and has worsened drastically for the last century. Much of our best land was taken from us and there were periods of cattle-diseases and poor harvests.

On the other hand, the economic situation of both weavers and blacksmiths was steadily rising.
As far as the former are concerned, demand for their products increased.
As for the blacksmiths, first it was the petty Oromo despots (last decades of the 19th century) who needed the blacksmiths more and more to repair the many guns they acquired. Then came the Greeks and other foreigners who needed them for their garages, mills and little factories.
But if a farmer became a blacksmith or a professional weaver, he became a tumtu. He himself was said to have learned the trade 'by day', but his son was said to have learned the trade 'by night'." (Gammachu Magarsa)

d. The tumtu themselves always say that there was a time that their ancestors were not tumtu

This answer may point to a time when they belonged still to another people where they practised the trade without being despised castes; but it can also mean that their Oromo ancestors once were forced to become blacksmiths.

e. The tumtu were made tumtu by force

"It happened already before we crossed the river Ghibie. Our people were very dependent on the blacksmiths. They made our spear-points, our knives, our plough-points and even the needles with which we sewed our shields. They looked down on us and they showed their pride in many ways. They even refused to marry us: they only married their likes.
On a fine day the blacksmiths organized a feast. They slaughtered oxen for us, but they did not skin them and they gave us the legs, the heads and other big parts of the oxen. 'Eat,' they said. But we replied: 'How can we eat them? We have no knives to skin and cut these big pieces of meat. So, please, give us your knives.' – 'Make them yourselves,' the tumtu replied.
At that the leaders of our people convoked a great meeting. 'Those blacksmiths ought to be made dependent on us,' they

said. 'We must keep them well under us. We must prevent them to unite themselves against us. So let us make a law that on the land of every clan there must be only a few tumtu who belong to that clan.' We also made many other laws to prevent the blacksmiths from dominating us."

(Qajela Magarsa, Gammachu's brother)

f. Those tumtu who are now weavers once were blacksmiths

"Weaving is not against saffu. It was practised from the very beginning by all house-wives, including those of the blacksmiths and tanners.

Cotton was cultivated by the men, but taking out the seeds (*hiddu*) and spinning the tread (*fou*) was done by women and girls only. Why it was this way, I do not know.

Weaving with shuttle (*kollo*) and loom (*arbi*), however, was again practised by both women and men.

The ancient clothes I know were 1. the *buluko,* a kind of blanket. There were several kinds of them: those wrapped six times, those wrapped three times and others wrapped only one time. The latter were white, but the others were woven in blocks of red, white and black. They were worn by both sexes, but on their holiday, Friday, the borana men wore them with their right shoulder bare. This fashion was called *'olga'.* 2. The women wore a *wandabo,* woven in one piece, with openings for the head and the arms, and worn with a belt. 3. Another woman's dress was the *waqaalo* (see above).

I think the loom was rather primitive in those days. But soon our people got acquainted with more perfectioned looms which enabled them to increase the production with less labour.

The blacksmiths' wives asked their husbands to make for them such better looms. The use of woven clothes must have increased at that time in addition to that of skin-dress. Because of this a fair number of blacksmiths turned to weaving. They also started making more and more *shamma,* the wide shawls as the Amhares wear them. Hence the name *'shamane'* which they are also given. But for all their changing their trade, they remained tumtu and we did not marry them. Oromo men who only wove for themselves and not for the market did not become tumtu."

(Gammachu Magarsa)

The answers given above are widely diverging and if we feel a little confused, indeed suspicious at this, so do the Oromo themselves. Still their attitude is different from ours.

They perceive very well the difference between what is historically true in a western, scientifical sense and what is not. But they are hardly interested in history for its own sake; in other words, they do not take distance from the past as something to be studied in itself.

To them the past is a chair for the living to sit on and which the latter ajust to their needs. In their 'historical' records the past is made subservient to the present and manipulated in order to support the needs and values of the living. As a result the answers given here refer to present values rather than to historical facts.

The past is seen as the source of their highest values and as the ultimate explanation of their way of life in all its major aspects, but with this its function is exhausted. More, where the historical past is forgotten, it is re-created if need be.

Accordingly, the answers as they are given should not be seen as attempts to meet the western historian's concern, though they may well harbour historical facts.

Thanks to his education, the extent of his reading and his long-time cooperation with me, a gifted man like Gammachu Magarsa shows more sense of history in his answers than the others and as such his final conclusion is worth quoting:

> "I really feel that the coming into existence of tumtu and faqi is a result of many factors in the way of life and the history of both our own people and the peoples with whom we came into contact. One cannot say: these or those are the reasons. Many factors have not been touched in the answers we have given."

As far as the tumtu's and faqi's physical appearance is concerned, though we cannot deny some credit to the people's own statements that tumtu girls are often handsome, that tumtu often distinguish themselves by a lighter complexion, and that faqi sometimes have long faces (a non-Oromo feature in their eyes), we can say that on the whole (at least in the Dembidollo area) the tumtu's and faqi's physical appearance is the same as that of other Oromo.

In addition, the people's answers regarding these despised castes' origins differ from clan to clan. In my assitant's clan, the Dhae, oral

tradition clearly tends to considering them as Oromo 'from the very beginning'. This view is also reflected in Gammachu's remark:

> "Don't forget that the very names 'tumtu' and 'faqi' point at their ayana (skill) and not at their descent."

It is worth mentioning that we find such occupational castes with many other peoples and not only so in the Horn of Africa. So the answer concerning their coming into existence should certainly be looked for in a wider field.

Eminent scholars such as E. Cerulli (1922:200 ff.), Haberland (1963:134) and W.A. Shack (1964:50) have argued that the artisan castes are remnants of earlier peoples, while others, like H.S. Lewis think that there is no reasonable evidence to support this. Lewis suggests that they may well have come into existence as a result of "a distinctive division of labour, a system for production and distribution of goods and services which demand special skills and training."[29]

Additional research may well result in discovering that both processes have taken place.

Finally, in regard to Lewis' suggestion, we should take into account that not only economical factors but also religious views have played a part.

4. Social change during the last decades

Though there are still from old hamlets where tumtu or faqi are living together, we observe presently: 1. that even in their own hamlets tumtu are not all of them blacksmiths any more; 2. that in a little village like Addo tumtu are living in the midst of other people, though they still prefer to be neighbours to their own people. In this village we find nowadays tumtu teachers and tumtu traders. With the faqi it is somewhat different. They still are living together in their former hamlet; their work ties them to the river. But here, too, we find people who are not tanners any longer.

In my own area of research social change has been rather strong for the last fifty years. Besides the factors mentioned already we should also point here to the impact of the missions. The missionaries, indeed,

[29] The quotation is from H.S. Lewis in his article "Wealth, influence and prestige among the Shoa Galla" in: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN AFRICA, edited by Arthur Tuden and Leonard Plotnicov, 1970, 185.

made a contribution all of their own to the improvement of the faqi's and tumtu's social position. They did so by their Christian message, by the number and quality of their schools and by the equal treatment they tried to meet out to all people indiscriminately. One of the church elders in Addo has been for years a tumtu. His election as such by the people, however, would not have come about without some pressure from their parish priest.

However, they did not succeed in overcoming the marriage taboo which still creates such a painful obstacle for the boys and girls of these occupational castes. Yet exceptions occur and increasingly so. Gammachu knew several Oromo boys who had married tumtu girls. On the other hand he did not know of any Oromo girl who had married a tumtu or faqi boy. The latter, and especially the tumtu boys, nowadays often find their brides among the Amhares and the Gurage. (The Gurage are traders who have spread throughout southern Ethiopia.)

Here follow some statements which shed more light on the present situation.

> "Nowadays, we work together with tumtu and faqi in our fields. If they are with us, we will not sing songs in which they are mentioned." (Ensermu Waquma)

> "For some time past, tumtu can buy land in our country. But all of us are angry, when Mammo Ruda [the landlord] sells it to them. I myself, too, am angry, since, according to Oromo law, they cannot buy land like the others." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

> "True nowadays, tumtu and faqi can speak in our meetings like others. But as soon as they say something people do not like, there are always some of us who say: 'He is only a tumtu'." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

The mother of my assistant Asafa Disasa put it this way:

> "In our country of Sayo we do not make any difference between ourselves. Tumtu women as well as women of other peoples like the Mao and Yambo [Anuak] do everything together with us.
>
> ["Everything" indeed, including birth-rituals.]

Were the latter not helping us even when our mothers were still children? At that time Mao and Yambo women and girls were their slaves. Faqi women, too, do help us. But after they have eaten or drunk, we still secretly clean the plates and cups they have used with *ebbicha* leaves, without saying a word about their being faqi.

[The bitter leaves of the fragrant *ebbicha* tree are still used for cleaning things and people in various rituals.]

However, in countries like Anfillo (to the west) and in others beyond Dembidollo tumtu and faqi are still forbidden to work along with the others."

[These areas are less under the influence of both the town and the missions.]

5. The evil-eye, 'hyenas' and sorcerers

It is said sometimes, that tanners and blacksmiths are invariably considered as bearers of the evil-eye, 'hyenas' and sorcerers. Such general statements fail to do justice to the Oromo's concept of man in this respect, to the various shades in their attitude against these despised castes, and to the effects of social change.

a. The people's views and attitudes in general

Matcha distinguish between three kinds of evil eye.

* First there are people who have the evil eye against their will; it is a matter of inheritance, of descent; it is like a disease. They are called *'budda'*. Such unlucky people often do their utmost to prevent themselves from harming others.

"When they see a fine calf, they will spit on it to give it back the life their eyes can take from it, or they will throw some wet grass on it to this effect." (Gammachu Magarsa)

* Second, anyone can have an evil-eye, on occasion, by jealousy, by begrudging others the good things they have. Such people are called *'hinhaftu'* or *'gomatu'* which just means 'jealous people'. Despised people are naturally more liable to be jealous.

* A person's eyes can also grow harmful out of anger, reproach, disillusion, or simply out of sadness because a beloved friend has to say goodbye. Whenever I had to say goodbye to my assistants and the final words had been said, they invariably turned away from me and went away without looking back.

Once I was waiting for the bus to Addis Ababa together with a boy who liked me very much. As soon as the bus had stopped in front of us, he stepped aside, turned his back to me and continued to stand this way until the bus moved on again, without even saying a single word of goodbye. A father brought his son to the landrover which would take him to the airport; the son was going to Addis Ababa for his studies. As soon as the boy had taken a seat in the landrover, his father turned away from him and remained standing this way until the landrover drove off.

> "When I am thirsty and I ask a woman who just comes from the river to have a drink from her jar, she will hand me her jar but at the same time she will turn away her head that she may not see me drinking." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

> "I am sure that the existence of hyena-people is connected with our food-taboo of not eating horses, mules and donkeys (animals without cloven hoofs) who are a delicacy to the hyenas. People who did eat them had taken something of the hyenas' ayana.
> Perhaps they were freed slaves who returned to the custom of their ancestors. Perhaps they were true Oromo who did so in times of starvation. The people who nowadays are called 'hyenas' could well be their descendants. But Waqa knows how few of them ever tasted donkey-meat.
> Anyhow, 'hyenas' (*warabesa*) do not harm living people unless they have the evil-eye. But they do not have it more than others. In our clan we had only one family of such 'hyenas' and they were good people.
>
> As far as other stories are concerned people tell about them. I really do not know what to think of them. They could well be fantastic elaborations of our belief that they have something of the hyenas' ayana. Some of them may have come from eastern Oromoland or even from other peoples. Many of them I do not believe at all." (Gammachu Magarsa)

These 'other stories' are about hyena-people who change themselves into real hyenas by night and together with other hyenas dig out human corpses to eat them (which hyenas do) and others in which hyena-people eat even living men (which hyenas also do occasionally).

In contrast to people who harm others by their looks, sorcerers (*tolcha*) harm them by doing something or by charms, put f. i. under the threshold. Sorcery always goes with malevolence.

> "I have said that blacksmiths make something lifeless out of a dead thing, and that, because of this, they are better than the tanners who take the last bit of life out of a living thing. But sorcerers are even more powerful than the blacksmiths in a way: they make something that kills out of nothing. They do not even need iron.
> A sorcerer, be it a man or a woman, always works alone and in secret. This mere fact in itself proves already that his work is evil. As soon as he is detected, he loses all his power."
>
> (Gammachu Magarsa)

> "Once I was sitting under a tree guarding my crops. Of a sudden I saw a tolcha coming. He was stark naked. He wanted to destroy my crops. I jumped to my feet and shouted. At that the tolcha ran away." (Ayelle Tura)

Asafa Disasa's father:

> "One of our neighbours is a tolcha. I saw him take earth from the mud-wall of our house. I shouted: 'Drop it!' He dropped it. Nothing happened to us."

After I had heard this little story, I asked Asafa:

> *Q.* "You say, that there are tolcha everywhere, but did you ever see a tolcha at work?"
> *A.* "I myself never saw it."
> *Q.* "Couldn't somebody make another man a tolcha only by telling a false story about him?"
> *A.* "O no. People do not believe it that lightly."
> *Q.* "What will you do, if a tolcha enters your house? Does he eat and drink with you?"

A. "Yes, he does. But we are afraid."
Q. "Are people ever born a tolcha?"
A. "No, it is not a matter of descent. But a son can learn it from his father."

We have already touched on the change in the people's attitude, brought about by the missionaries and by social change in general. The following statements of my assistants – all of them younger men – are certainly a result of it.

"Tumtu and faqi are not all of them evil-eyers, sorcerers or 'hyenas' by far." (Asafa Disasa)

"There are no more sorcerers and evil-eyers among the tumtu and faqi than among other people." (Beqele Lamu)

"We can not say that all tumtu and faqi are *budda* or 'hyenas' or sorcerers. That is not true. *Budda,* 'hyenas', and sorcerers are to be found among all people, and even borana can be people with a jealous eye. There are many good people among the tumtu and faqi who do not harm anybody."
(Gammachu Magarsa)

b. A few illustrations

"One of our neighbours was a *budda.* She was a distant relative of mine. She liked me very much and I liked her and never felt any fear that she would harm me. People knew that I liked her and that, on occasion, I bought a dress for her, and they laughed at me. Once I said to her: 'I would like to ask you something, though I know that it could grieve you. Tell me: people say that you are a *budda,* but do you feel yourself that you are a *budda,* that you are harming people? I am that sad that people say such things of you; perhaps I can help you.'
At that she first started weeping; she could not say a word. After this she said: 'I do not know what I am. Perhaps I am a *budda,* perhaps I am not. I do not understand what people see in me. As for me, I feel nothing of a *budda* in myself. What the others see in me I do not know'." (Gammachu Magarsa)

The following stories and statements all come from a teacher, fourty years of age, who spent his youth in an area somewhat to the

north of our area. I have no reason to assume that his country differed much from the Dembidollo area at that time. In the latter, however, social change in favour of the despised castes has been greater for the last decades.

Kassay Wolde Yohannes:

> "In my youth there were people who, as soon as a tumtu appeared near their house, immediately hid their young calves from his look. My own mother was not like this. She had many friends among the tumtu. When a tumtu passed by our house and we had a little calf, my mother would call him in. 'Please, bless my calf,' she would say. 'Spit on it.' She knew that, when a tumtu has blessed a calf, he will not harm it anymore. [He is evidently speaking here of the jealous-eye.] It is like an oath on his part. So the tumtu came in and he spat on our calf, saying: 'May Waqa cause it to grow up for you.' After this, my mother brought him a calabash with milk. The tumtu took the calabash in his hands and said: 'Have many young cattle. May there always be milk in your house.' Next my mother poured some of this milk into a smaller calabash and passed it to the tumtu that he might drink from it. After this both of them were happy.
>
> But we did not call in the faqi in such a case. We were more afraid of them than of the tumtu.
>
> However, when we had *Saa daabbachu* (a ritual of thanksgiving after the birth of a calf), we invited not only our neighbours but also tumtu and faqi who were living further away. We did not invite other people who were living further away. Then the tumtu and faqi entered our house and they blessed the cow and her calf. In this way we did not need to be afraid of them anymore.
>
> [We see here another feature in the mutual relations: the tumtu and faqi occasionally profited from the people's discrimination.]
>
> Tumtu could even enter our backroom.
>
> Once, my little sister was sick. My mother said to me: 'Call N.N. (a tumtu) that he may bless your little sister.' Our backroom was full of neighbours. The tumtu came in and sat down with them. My mother now took an axe and said: 'My neighbours, our little daughter is very sick. Perhaps, someone is 'eating her' [someone with an evil-eye]. Therefore, please, all of you, bless my child.' The blessing was only intended for the tumtu, but my mother

did not give the axe straight to the tumtu. She first gave it to another woman and this woman passed it on to her neighbour, and in this way it reached the tumtu. Every woman spat on the axe and said: *'Si busera* – I have dropped you [the sick child].' Those other people were not *budda,* but they acted as if they were for the sake of the tumtu. In the end, the axe reached the tumtu. He spat on it and said: 'I have dropped you. May Waqa cool down my heart on your behalf like this iron. May he restore your child to health.'

This tumtu gave a very fine blessing and everyone clapped his hands.

["Cool down" = take away bad (hot) feelings]

But not all tumtu are like this. Once, on a similar occasion, a tumtu woman was with us in our backroom. Everyone said in turn: 'I have dropped you', but the tumtu woman grew angry and said only very reluctantly: 'I have dropped you.' The others protested, but she did not yield.

The next day, however, my mother called her again. She came along. This time, she gave my little sister a very good blessing.

Once I also saw a tolcha at work.

I was a boy of some twelve years old. One fine day, I went out early in the morning to fetch an ox with whom our own ox had to plough that day. I was not far from our house, when I saw a man. He had a long *ankasa* (a stick, provided at its foot with a long iron point). While walking, he was muttering to himself continuously. He did not see me. I hid myself quickly. After a while, he stopped, still muttering to himself. He planted his *ankasa* in the ground, stripped off all his clothes, and, wholly naked, he started rolling about in our neighbour's field. That field had been recently sown with wheat. The wheat had sprouted and was very promising. The man rolled about in the young wheat everywhere. I ran home and said: 'O mother, I saw a man who did such and such a thing. What is that?' My mother was frightened. 'O, o, o, that man is a sorcerer,' she said. 'Did you recognize him?' – 'Yes', I said, 'It was such and such.' – 'That man is a sorcerer, indeed,' she said.

After this, the whole fine field of wheat was spoiled. Weeds came up everywhere and killed all the young wheat-plants. I remember

how, when the weeds were high, all of us helped our neighbour to pull them out and to burn them."

There is still a lot of talk about the evil-eye, sorcery and 'hyenas'. Whenever people do so in earnest, they often speak in a low voice or with a hand before their mouth. I also never heard of public accusations in regard to particular persons. It is evident that this is from fear of the accused people's vengeance. To a great extent belief in the evil-eye and in sorcery provides people with easy explanations for misfortunes otherwise unexplicable. A normal way of saying that somebody is sick is still the expression *"Ijatu isa tuqe* – he has been hit by the evil-eye."

> "Even among ourselves there is much confusion about the evil-eye, the jealous-eye, hyena-people and sorcerers.
> It would not be good if you tried to describe in a clear way what is not even clear to ourselves. It would be falsifying the truth." (Gammachu Magarsa)

PART FOUR

THE IMPACT OF THE BLOOD

Chapter 20

THE LINEAGE

"The world of clans and lineages could be compared with the undergrowth of a forest", we have said, "an undergrowth so dense that it is impossible to disentangle all its constituents." Some lines, however, can be perceived, though they are not always very sharp and cannot always be traced to their end.

One line is the clear distinction between clans and lineages. The clan *(qomo)*[30] is first of all a social group, consisting of several descent groups who need not all be Oromo. The heart of every clan is compounded of a cluster of lineages tracing their descent to the ancestor who gave his name to the clan.

In contrast to the clan, the lineage (*balballa*-door) is in practice considered by people as of homogenous descent. "All people of the same lineage are of one blood", they say. Outwardly this results, among other things, in the obligation of blood-vengeance, when somebody of their lineage has been killed by a member of another lineage. Inwardly it results in the prohibition against 'shedding one's own blood'. This can be done in two ways, either by manslaughter or by sexual intercourse. Lineage members may not marry one another and any sexual intercourse between them is regarded as incest, though the degree may differ. In other words: all people of the same lineage are seen to be brothers and sisters to one another.

1. Manslaughter within a lineage

A man who has killed a member of his own lineage cannot be killed by his victim's family, either peace is made or he is expelled from his lineage.

> "My own father told me that, in former times, people thought that a man who had killed his 'brother' would contract leprosy. My own lineage does not kill me." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

> "If you killed your 'brother' unknowingly, you could make peace. If you killed him knowingly, you were expelled from the

[30] The word 'qomo' is often used instead of 'balballa' but never the other way round.

country. ('Country' often means both the place and the people.)" (Shagerdi Bukko)

[The verb *'beku*-to know' has usually the connotation of 'knowing by experience'. In this sense the Matcha say: "He has known a woman," i. e. he had sexual intercourse with her. The word 'unknowingly' (*beka male*) does not mean that the killer did not know that the other person was his brother or sister, but that, in one way or another, there were extenuating circumstances such as drunkenness, sudden anger, misunderstanding,. 'Knowingly' implies a deed with malice aforethought.]

"A man who had killed a member of his own lineage was not killed in his turn but expelled. Others could kill the killer but not members of his own lineage. They also could make peace. There were not two parties: there was only one, they were one blood. So it is with a lineage, but it is not the same for the clan at large.

So if a man had killed a member of his own lineage 'unknowingly', they made peace. If he had killed 'knowingly' they threw him out. They were afraid of becoming lepers, if they would kill him. His expulsion was decided immediately, the matter was not brought before the *gada*-judges." (Dinsa Sarba)

Peacemaking included: 1) protracted peace-negotiations; 2) the payment of a blood-price (generally in cattle, never in money); 3) an elaborate peacemaking ritual taking place near a river.

Shagerdi Bukko was invited to act as a ritual leader at peacemaking rituals on several occasions. Here is a short interview with him by young Mirresa Gamtesa.

MG.: "Were you ever invited by people to help them to make peace after a killing?"

SB.: "Yes, on occasion."

MG.: Are you willing to describe for me such a peacemaking ritual, please?"

SB.: "Once a boy threw away a pointed stick and hit his own sister. The stick hit her head and she died from it. The boy had not intended to hit his sister. He fled from home and hid himself from his father and mother."

MG.: "Did you go to make peace there as a *luba* (ritual leader)?"
SB.: "Yes, I did."

[It is probable that the parents have taken good time to display their grief. The blood-price cannot have been much, and must have had a rather formal character.]

The boy kept hidden from his parents until everything was ready for the peacemaking ritual. An old ewe was bought.

[A sheep past bearing, since it is sinful to kill a sheep wich can still bear. There is another reason as well why it should be an old sheep: it is not eaten in this case. Rams are always eaten before they are old.]

We told the boy to cross the river for the peacemaking ritual. The name of that river was Haraya. His parents and his brothers and sisters remained on this side of the river. Two men held a piece of cloth between the boy and the rest of his family that they could not see one another (to prevent the boy from being harmed by the evil eye). There was another *luba* to assist the boy. They shook hands in the sheep's stomach.

[The stomach is cut open above the flowing water and both parties shake hands in the blood.]

While doing this they did not see one another. Had not the boy killed his sister? Taking the leaves of the *maracha* plant, the other *luba* and I myself splashed blood and *horra*-water over the killer and his family. After this the piece of cloth was removed. We threw the sheep in the river. After this we prayed."

In view of the circumstances, it must have been a simplified ritual. (For a more complete record of such a ritual see chapter 22.)

2. No marriage within a lineage

"We are all children of Sayo. Our clan is called Abbichu. We have five *balballa* (lineages): Doye, Hanu, Unu, Hinu and Fullo. We do not marry within our own lineage, for we are of one blood. The same blood should not be mingled. I cannot marry a Fullo woman, since I am a Fullo myself. But I may marry a woman of another lineage of the Abbichu. An Abbichu can not

> marry a girl if her lineage and his are the same. Within each lineage we call each other brothers and sisters. A man who lays with his sister sheds her blood; it is like killing somebody. One should not shed one's own blood." (Shagerdi Bukko)

Shagerdi's last words reflect his people's view of the act of sexual intercourse in general. The whole wedding ritual emphasizes that the bride is 'pierced' by the groom and that she sheds her maiden-blood for the sake of motherhood (and also later on, this idea of blood shed as connected with female fertility remains connected with sexual intercourse).

Incest, then, is in the Matcha's view primarily 'shedding one's own blood'. The verb they use for it is *'haramu'* and the act itself is called *'harama'*. There are, of course, degrees of *'harama'*, but the more serious cases are certainly seen as great sin.

> "Having sexual intercourse with your own sister, a daughter of your own father or mother is worse than killing your brother." (Gammachu Magarsa)

> "Incest is a great sin. It is worse than stealing. It is as bad as murder. People will say: 'That man shed his own blood; he lay with his sister.' A man who kills another person and a man who lies with his sister, that is the same. It can only be washed away by blood. It is bad, very bad." (Shagerdi Bukko)

So far we have not said a word about the extent of a lineage as an exogamous descent group. This extent is indicated by the following rule:

> "A man cannot marry a woman with whom she shares the seventh grandfather on his father's side or the fifth on his mother's side."

While speaking of a lineage in Matcha society, we have only to do with the father's side. Here the rule means exogamy within nine generations. The concept of lineage, then, supposes nine generations.

NB. Shagerdi Bukko sees the rule of the seventh grandfather as a relaxation: "According to the law of Makko Billi, we should count nine and not seven grandfathers on our father's side. In former times, when people married after seven grandfathers, we said: 'They act in a hurry. Perhaps their children will not be healthy.' But, in fact, every one nowadays ignores this prohibition."

Ideally, then, each individual should know the names of seven forefathers, (the general name of whom is *'akakayu'*, a word that strictly speaking means 'grandfather') in order to know which people he can marry or rather the names of all grandfathers who are seen as belonging to the lineage, but in fact only a minority do this. Whenever there are doubts, however, they can consult specialists. The rule of lineage exogamy is still upheld, and not only where marriage proper is at stake.

> "We do not dance with girls who are of one blood with us. We always remember of the seven grandfathers on our father's side and the five on our mother's side. We do not kiss girls we cannot marry. Kissing and sexual intercourse have something in common." (Asafa Disasa)
>
> [It should be noted that 1. the normal way for youths and girls to kiss is inside the mouth, 2. kissing and dancing are associated. During the dance boys and girls withdraw among the bushes to kiss one another. They may also remain in the open, covering their heads with a shamma (a wide shawl). Instead of saying of someone: "He has gone to dance", people may say equally: "He has gone to kiss the girls."]

3. The ritual of purification following incest

This is performed after both actual and classificatory incest. Matcha society recognizes several examples of classificatory relationships: brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers.

Even in earlier times, the ritual of purification was not always performed. A great deal depended on 1. the degree of incest involved, 2. whether the deed had become public or not, 3. (the most important) whether bad consequences had resulted from the incest such as an unhealthy child, sickness, or barrenness. People still strongly believe that such bad consequences may ensue, so I presume that the ritual is still performed occasionally in secret and in a simplified form. Either the man or the woman could take the initiative.

The following record was given me substantially by Shagerdi Bukko.

> "When somebody has committed incest and wishes to be purified from it he first contacts one or two elders in his lineage. These

two elders, in their turn, invite two others, since there should be four altogether. Of these four two should be *gula* (men who had gone through all the rites and grades of the *gada*-system).

These four men first discuss the matter in hand. After this they call the guilty man. Having spoken with him about his crime, they pray.

'O Waqa, this man has told us his crime, cleanse him for us.'

[Thus one gula. The others answer:]

'CLEANSE HIM FOR US.'

'From what he has committed unknowingly, cleanse him for us.'

'CLEANSE HIM FOR US.'

'He went in to his sister, cleanse him for us.'

'CLEANSE HIM FOR US.'

[That he committed his sin 'unknowingly' is always assumed for a first transgression.]

They agree on the day of purification. On that day he must be washed in the *horra* (spring of mineral water). Before taking him there, they give him a beating.

On that chosen day they go to his house early in the morning. They tie his hands and feet to the bed and beat him with rods. Every elder in turn beats him, until his rod is broken. While he is doing this the others question him thus: 'Why do you beat him?' And he answers: 'He has gone into his sister. He has shed his own blood. He has done wrong against his people. He should be punished so that he will never transgress again.' To the culprit he says: 'Do not do this again. If you do, there will no longer be a place for you in our country.'

After the beating, they take him to the horra. The woman, too, accompanies them. In our country (that of the Abbichu clan) we used to go to the horra of Abba Gorba; the same horra to which we bring our cattle.

On the way to the horra, the man who has sinned must wear the clothes he wore when he sinned as must the woman also. The latter brings also the 'sleeping-skin of her sin'. She is accompanied by the sister of one of the two gula (she is called *gultu*) who will cleanse her.

On their way the gula and gultu will collect branches of *maracha* and *ulmaya*. They need the leaves of maracha and ulmaya to wash the culprits. The gula and gultu must collect these branches themselves.

[Regarding the symbolism of *maracha* (a creeper) and *ulmaya* (a bush) Waquma Tollera told me: "When Waqa created man in the beginning of time he blessed them with ulmaya and maracha, saying: 'By these ulmaya and maracha incest will be removed.'
Maracha does not hurt people. It is very gentle and produces many shoots. When people pass by and touch it, it is enough for the maracha to stick to their clothes and to give them its blood which is like milk (i.e. the whitish juice of the plant). It ties things together, especially plants, which it does in a very gentle way. There is nothing about it that is not good for man. It does nothing that makes us dislike it. People call it *'qulqullu'* (faultless, 'holy'). It also does not burn easily nor feed fire. It is impossible to use it for any evil purpose."
As seen through the eyes of this old man maracha is magnificent symbol of blessing from Waqa and of peace between people.][31]

After reaching the horra, the two gula, together with the elders first proclaim the law of *saffu*.

[The law of the world order and social order as given to them by Waqa from the beginning.]

[In the following dialogue 1 is the first gula, always a borana, 2 is the second one, 3 is the group as a whole. The second gula asks the borana to bless.]

2. 'Come!'
1. 'I have come.'
2. 'In the same way you have come, may good come to the country.'
1. 'I am going to say the *saffu*. Thorns and soles of feet are *saffu* one to another.'

[31] Cf. Strelcyn, S. 1973:198, about the qualities of *maracha*.

3. 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU INDEED.'
1. 'Toes and tree-trunks are *saffu* one to another.'
3. 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU INDEED.'
1. 'Ashes and flour are *saffu* one to another.'
3. 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU INDEED.'
1. 'Mineral water and ordinary water are *saffu* one to another.'
3. 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU INDEED.'
1. 'Small and great are *saffu* one to another.'
3. 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU INDEED.'
1. 'Old and young are *saffu* one to another.'
3. 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU INDEED.'
1. 'Slave-maid and mistress are *saffu* one to another.'
3. 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU INDEED.'
1. 'Father and son are *saffu* one to another.'
3. 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU INDEED.'
1. 'Mother and daughter are *saffu* one to another.'
3. 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU INDEED.'
2. 'Why did you recite the *saffu* law, my friend?'
1. 'This *saffu* is from Waqa and from the earth.'

[The list of *saffu* items given on such occasions may be much longer. It points to the fact that by the incest 'a boundary has been broken'.]

After this they proclaim anew the law of Makko Billi.
1. 'Say the law of Makko Billi.'
2. 'The law of Makko Billi as we learned it, runs like this:
If blood passes the boundary set for it in regard to other blood;
if a man sheds his own blood,
the blood that was shed must be washed away by other blood.
The guilty persons must be washed and immersed,
and the man must pay a 'bull of guilt'.
Such is the law of Makko Billi.'

[Here Shagerdi Bukko's account was interrupted by some questions asked by my assistant Asafa Disasa.]

As.: 'Can other people, too, go with them to the horra?'
SB.: 'Yes, but they must keep at a distance. Only those who wash and are washed go to the horra.'
As.: 'Who is washed first?'
SB.: 'The woman. She is washed by the gultu.
First she takes off all her clothes. All the hairs of her body are cut, except the hairs of her head. Also her nails are cut that no

dirt may remain. They do not bury this hair and nail parings (as on other occasions), but throw them under a tree in a spot where wild animals will not find them.
After this the gultu washes her with maracha or ulmaya. She dips the leaves in the horra and passes them across her body, from above downwards. She passes them over her face, her breasts, her abdomen, her thighs, and legs.
During this, the guilty woman stands beside the horra. The horra is very pure (*qulqullu*); therefore she may not enter it until she has been cleansed.
While she is washing the woman, the gultu prays:
'O my horra water, o my maracha, this woman has sinned; cleanse her for our sake.
O Waqa, she has sinned, she has committed incest. Replace that incest (or rather its bad consequences) by something good.'
The woman who is washed also prays herself.
She washes 'the clothes and the sleeping-skin of her sin' beside the horra.
When this is done she enters the horra and is totally immersed in it. She comes out of the horra and puts on a new dress. During this time both women continue to pray.

Now the man is washed in the same way by one of the gula, following the same procedure as for the woman. The gula prays: 'O Waqa have mercy on him. Take away his incest. Make him pure again. Cleanse him for our sake.'
Before returning home, they put some horra water in a calabash. This calabash should be decorated with straw work around the brim. The gula themselves must draw this water.
Together they say to the man and the woman: 'Let us go home now. We have prayed Waqa for you. You were impure, now you are pure again.' Thus they speak to both of them. If the woman has proved to be barren, they say to her: 'May Waqa give a a healthy womb again.'

They go to the woman's house, never the man's. Other people have already removed from this house the grass which lay beneath her sleeping-skin, and have replaced it with fresh grass. Within the house an old woman starts making *buna qala* (coffee-fruits stewed in butter). The woman making this *buna qala* should not have had sexual intercourse the night before, as

should be everyone taking part in the ritual. How can they cleanse others if they are not clean themselves?
While preparing this buna qala, the old woman says many prayers. 'O Waqa', she prays, 'make this house a house of peace again. Have mercy. Keep this woman from incest in the future.'
After the coffeefruits have burst open, she puts a few on either side of the threshold (a short beam between the front- and the backroom) saying: 'O Waqa, let this threshold never again become a threshold of incest.'
She also puts some fruits against the *borro* (the backwall of the backroom) saying: 'O Waqa, let this backroom never become a backroom of incest again.'
The gula splash horra water in the backroom with ulmaya or maracha leaves.
The man who was cleansed kills a bull near the house. This bull is called *'korma yakka* – bull of guilt'. The colour of the bull does not matter.

[It is not a sacrificial animal, so the colour is immaterial. An ox, however, is not appropriate on this occasion, since, in a sense, the animal is the man himself who has acted like a bull.]

The man and woman are sprinkled with the bull's blood, in the same way that they were sprinkled with horra water. The woman is sprinkled in her house. The blood is later washed off with horra water.
The guilty man must provide plenty of beer.

Before they begin to eat and drink together, the elders pray: 'May Waqa give you peace. He took away your incest, may he now give good things to you.'

To the woman they say: 'May your next child not be a child of incest; may Waqa keep it from dying before your eyes. Your thighs have been cleansed, may the child that is born from between them also be undefiled.' "

A supplementary interview:

As.: "What do they do with the knife that was used to kill the bull?"
SB.: "It must be cleaned with horra water."

As.: "They killed not an ox but a bull. Is this because the man is a bull?"
SB.: "Yes, so they must kill a bull."
As.: "Didn't you say that the woman, too, had to be washed with the bull's blood?"
SB.: "Yes, she should be washed as well."
As.: "But she did not pay for that bull; how then can she be cleansed by its blood?"
SB.: "It is not she who went to that man's house, it is the man who 'broke her fence'. Therefore it's he who pays the bull."

[His passing through the fence is seen here a 'breaking through it' because he made it unlawful by his evil intention. It should be noticed here, that the woman was also cleansed first.]

As.: "Is the woman's husband present at the ritual?"
SB.: "No, he is not."
As.: "Does the woman always take her sleeping-skin to the horra?"
SB.: "Not always. If she left it home, it is cleansed in the house with horra water. Sometimes, the woman does not go to the horra at all. She is cleansed then in her house."

[Custom leads to make the situation easier for the woman since in Matcha eyes the chief fault is always with the man.]

This then is the ritual Shagerdi Bukko saw performed in his own lineage. Minor variations according to clan-traditions and circumstances are common. It should be observed that only a few prayers are given here. People pray much more, not only are there other prayers, but as well those used are repeated many times.

4. Expulsion from the lineage

Expulsion from the lineage following a killing and the one following incest were much the same. Waquma Tollera here describes an expulsion following incest as it was done in his own country, Tchaliya (eastern Matchaland). It is very similar to the scattered information I obtained from my informants who were born in the Dembidollo area.

"When a boy and a girl of the same lineage have committed incest and their sin has become public, usually through the girl's

pregnancy, their parents will come together and call the children before them.

'We are the same lineage,' they will say, 'why did you do this evil thing? If we were of different lineages, you could at least marry one another, but now you will have to separate, before your child is born (which means that the child will not be born normally at all, but will be killed by abortion). And you, our daughter will be unable to contract a decent marriage after this.'

If the boy and girl say that they want to stay together, their parents will call two gula. As soon as the gula arrive, they call their children again and now the gula, too, will speak to them in the same way.

If the boy and the girl are obdurate, their fathers will take their ritual praying-sticks (used both to bless and to curse) and the two gula will say these words which the parents must repeat after them. Not only their parents repeat them, but their entire kin do the same.

G.: "Until now, we were all of us the same lineage. You destroyed our lineage. Be without lineage."
P.: "BE WITHOUT LINEAGE."
G.: "Be lost."
P.: "BE LOST."
G.: "Be dry."
P.: "BE DRY."
G.: "May Waqa make you childless."
P.: "MAY HE MAKE YOU CHILDLESS."
G.: "May he refuse you life."
P.: "MAY HE REFUSE YOU LIFE."
G.: "Stay in a land without water."
P.: "STAY IN A LAND WITHOUT WATER."
G.: "Stay in a land without grain."
P.: "STAY IN A LAND WITHOUT GRAIN."
G.: "Water has no resting place, may you have even less."
P.: "MAY YOU HAVE EVEN LESS."
G.: "Be reduced to nothing on the earth."
P.: "BE REDUCED TO NOTHING ON THE EARTH."
G.: "Be reduced to nothing under the sky."
P.: "BE REDUCED TO NOTHING UNDER THE SKY."[32]

[32] The whole curse is very reminiscent of the curse put on Cain after he had killed his brother. (Genesis chap. 4)

[Waqa and the earth are called as witnesses.]

They blow ashes from their hands in their direction, saying:
G.: "Be blown away like ashes."
P.: "BE BLOWN AWAY LIKE ASHES."
And they throw *hantati* after them, saying:
G.: "Be like *hantati.*"
P.: "BE LIKE HANTATI."

[*Hantati* are little dry twigs, too thiny to be useful even for firing – a symbol of utter uselessness and of death.]

All the people of their lineage repeat this, whenever the boy and the girl pass by their houses.

And so they leave and generally they will have no other children because of the curse.
Their parents will never visit them, nor will they ever return to their parents. If the parents hear that their child has died, they will say: 'It is nothing. Our child was already dead to us. Our hearts have turned to stone in his (her) regard.' "

Since both of them are now without lineage, unprotected and outlawed, they will flee at the first opportunity to some wealthy man and ask him to take them into his service, which offers very poor prospects. The Matcha call such people *'tchirrata'*, meaning they have cut themselves from their kinsfolk. They would be unable to approach any lineage in their clan and would be obliged to flee to another clan.

5. My 'brothers' wives

As with all Oromo the Matcha know the levirate, an institution by which a widow as a rule marries her husband's brother. In old times, this man was normally a son of her husband's father or, at least, his father's brother's son, a cousin. Under pressure from the Ethiopian Church cousins began to be preferred to full brothers or even half-brothers.

All these brothers and cousins of her husband then were potential husbands of a woman. The kinship-term for this relationship between a woman and them is *'warsa'*, which means that both parties are *warsa* towards one another.

"I am *warsa* to my brothers' wives. A man can ask his brother to take care of his wife in his absence (this includes sexual inter-

course) that she may not have sexual intercourse with lower people." (Shagerdi Bukko)

Sexual intercourse between warsa, however, was rather limited. As a wise old man told one of my assistants:

> "A sensible woman would 'know' only one warsa. With this man – always a younger brother of her husband – she would have a permanent relationship, and with him she would marry, in the event of her husband's death. It is not good for a woman to have several of her husband's brothers as lovers at the same time; it causes friction in her husband's family."

However, she had not only to make a choice out of her warsa, but also from other men. There was a law that all men of the same lineage could have sexual intercourse with one another's wives.

> "When men of the same lineage go to one another's wife, people do not speak about it, even though the priests disapprove of it. We continue in many things to apply to our ancient laws." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

Of a virtuous woman it was said:

> "Only men of her husband's lineage put their spear against her house."

When a man entered another man's house to make love to his wife, it was customary for him to put his spear against the house, as a sign that the 'house' was occupied. The husband always takes his spear with him into the house, other men may never take their spear with them into another's house.

It was to a woman's credit to have several liaisons of this sort. A sensible choice was the ideal here also.

> "She would admit only a few men of her choice, men who were not of lower blood than her husband and were on friendly terms with him. Even within the same lineage blood is not the same. She would, however, keep the names of her lovers secret; it is best if only the woman herself knows who shares her sleeping-skin." (Gammachu Magarsa)

[A woman's children were all legally her husband's.]

With regard to the number of her lovers, people used to say: "If she admits too many men, she is like a cow."

It was customary among neighbours not to speak to the husband of his wife's lovers.

But another law has a part here, too; the law that every man is king in his own compound and that no other man may enter his house without his permission. So, if a man discovered one of his wife's lovers in his house, he could claim a fine from him, even if the intruder was his wife's warsa. This, too, was laid down in Matcha law.

> "When a man at his coming home saw a spear standing against his house, he often knew whose spear it was. He could then retire out of friendship for the intruder. He could also go to the latter's house and repay him in kind. He could also take away the spear or enter his house, take the man's clothes, and bring them to the elders. 'N.N. went to my wife,' he would say to them. 'Therefore I have taken his spear and his coat. Here they are. Did I not pay for my wife, when I married her? Why did he take what is mine?'
>
> Once I did this kind of thing when my wife's warsa had gone in to her. Why did he pass by his own food? Why did he steal my sleeping-skin? Why did he milk my cow? So I claimed a young bull from him. He paid that bull. He never went to my wife again. But for the rest, there is nothing wrong with it. It is good, if men of the same lineage go to each others' wives."
>
> (Shagerdi Bukko)

Shagerdi tells us that he claimed a young bull. Here, too, it had to be a bull, and not an ox. Had the man not acted like a bull?

Even so, the compensation Shagerdi Bukko claimed was only half of the fine established by Matcha law, which said the intruder must pay a cow-calf as well, a symbol of the woman he had taken. But at that time it was no longer the custom to do so.

For the rest, the many fines fixed by Matcha law for all kinds of transgressions were not expected to be paid fully in practice. One had always to display understanding and flexibility so that in a case like this the husband would often be content with a ram or even with a calabash of honey.

Ancient Matcha society did not know prostitutes. During my stay in the area, a woman, known to be a prostitute, attempted to settle in

the village of Addo. The whole population was angry. Prostitutes, they said, should remain in town.

There is still something left of the good old days when going to one another's wives and trying to escape problems with the husband was a beloved sport, indulged in by both sexes, and only blameworthy if one brought 'lower blood' into another man's legal offspring.

The following story of Shagerdi Bukko illustrates further the people's view of these matters.

> "A man had married a woman. He said to his wife: 'Don't sleep with any other man of my lineage.' 'Allright,' she said, and she had a son by her husband.
> After this he told her: 'Now you must sleep with your warsa.' So this she did. He himself took care not to sleep with her, until she had conceived a child from her warsa. This child, too, proved to be a son.
> After this he said to her: 'Now you must sleep with a man who is not of my lineage.' This, too, she did, and she had a third son. The boys grew up together.
> One day, the man gave his wife a beating. 'Look', he said to her, 'I have beaten you badly. Now call your eldest son. Give him something to eat that he likes very much. Then you must start weeping and say: 'Your father has beaten me, my son – me, your mother who gave you life. Look at the bruises. Why don't you kill him?' Thus you must speak to our eldest son. After this you must do the same with our second and third son. I myself am going away now for some time. When I come back, tell me what they have said.'
> So the father went away and the mother did as she had been told. She made a fine meal for her eldest son, and, while he was eating, she started weeping and said: 'O my son, do you know that your father has beaten me, me your mother who gave you life, me your mother who gave you my breasts? Look at the bruises. Why don't you kill him?' Thus she spoke. But the son replied: 'No, no, my mother, never, never I will kill my father.' And he went out.
> After this she invited her second son, and, while they were eating, she showed him the bruises of her beating, and again she said: 'Look, my son, how badly I was beaten by your father, me your mother who has given you life.' And she pointed to a spear in the house and said: 'Why don't you kill him?' But this son,

too, replied: 'No, no, my mother, never, never will I kill my father. But, if you want so, go out and call the women of our neighbourhood that they may protest publicly.'
After this, she did the same with her third son. This third son, who was the son of a *halaga* (people of another lineage), grew very angry and said: 'I will kill him', and he went out raging.
After some time, the father came home. 'What did my sons say?' he asked his wife. She told him what they had said.
Then the father called the man who had begotten his third son and said to him: 'I return you my third son, the one you begot. Take him back.' The man replied: 'Allright, I will take him.'
Then he called his brother (his wife's warsa) and told him the same. But the warsa replied: 'No, no, my son is yours for all he is mine. Let him stay with you.'
Thus men of the same lineage must watch each others' houses. An enemy breeds an enemy, a *halaga* breeds a *halaga,* a brother breeds a son. If a halaga begets a child in your house, it is not good for our lineage. The man to whom you trust your wife in your absence, should be a man as near to you as possible. So we trust our wives to their warsa.

When we want to know if a girl will be a good wife for our son, we will ask whether her mother ever slept with a man of another lineage than her husband's. If we are told that her mother never did so, we will take her daughter for our son."

6. Every lineage has its own ayana

Every lineage like every being on this earth has its own *ayana* in it, something of Waqa's creative power, making it as it is. At the same time, the word 'ayana' indicates the product of this divine activity, a lineage's characteristics, its 'personality'.

Accordingly, people speak of lineages who have the ayana of good farmers, good fighters, good singers. Or they say: "It is the ayana of that lineage that their girls are handsome, that the men are good bee-keepers," or "it is that lineage's ayana that they do not eat such and such an animal."

We came already across a lineage in the Waqalale clan who did not eat sheep, though they were not borana. Other lineages have different food-taboos.

> "I know a boy at the university. His lineage does not eat dwarf-antelopes. This is because one of his ancestors once had taken *kosso* (a laxative anti tapeworm medicine) and went out to relieve himself. A dwarf-antelope butted him with its horns and he died from the wounds." (A student)

Most such food-taboos are traced to such an experience among their ancestors. In the case just mentioned the people would explain their custom by saying: "We do not eat dwarf-antelopes, because the ayana of the dwarf-antelopes does not like us."

When a certain food has proved fatal one member of a lineage, the others tend to abstain from it henceforth.

Every lineage has its own minor variations in the performance of domestic rituals, specific traditions to which they believe they have to adhere 'because such is the ayana of their lineage'. In connection with this they prefer – or, in former times, preferred – to be assisted at those rituals by ritual leaders of their own lineage, since the efficacy of the ritual will be enhanced thereby.

If people say: "Such is the custom of our lineage", they usually also mean that this custom has proved its efficacy throughout several generations.

Their thought in this respect is illustrated by the following example, though it does not refer to one lineage's ayana, but to the common ayana of all Sayo.

In eastern Matchaland it was a custom that the men whose turn it was to slaughter their *butta* bull in accordance with the rites of their *gada* system, did so near a marsh (*tchaffe*), which is normally part of a river-bed, i. e. on the wet place, a symbol of fertility.

In Sayoland this custom was changed.

> "In the beginning all people slaughtered their *butta* bull near the river. But once upon a time, there was a lame man who could not go there. Therefore, he slaughtered his bull in front of his house. That year, he had a very good harvest and many, many young cattle and sheep. Seeing that Waqa had blessed him, the Sayo made a new law: they would not slaughter their butta bull near the river any longer but in front of their house."
>
> (Shagerdi Bukko)

Besides food-taboos and ritual variations of their own, the people of a lineage would also share specific lineage stories celebrating great

deeds or words of wisdom of their ancestors, thus passing on their wisdom to the younger generations. (Some of such stories are found in chapter 9.4.)

Lineage-consciousness from old was also reflected in the custom of keeping secret certain knowledge within one's own lineage exclusively such as: knowledge of the medical qualities of plants, skill in curing cattle-diseases, the art of reading the future in a goat's peritoneum (*morra*), the gift of prophecy, knowledge of the stars (in connection with rain and favourable or unfavourable days for certain activities), knowledge of the law and of the birth and history of clans and lineages. Such specialities were normally passed on from the father to his eldest son and from the mother to her eldest daughter.

All members of a lineage have to manifest their lineage's ayana in their lives, to live up to its good qualities. There may, for example, be a relatively strong tradition of killing big game. In such a lineage a prospective buffalo-killer may sing:

> Mud in the water,
> exasperation in my heart:
> what his father calls his own (a buffalo-trophy)
> why should his son lack it?

To be a good fighter was one of the most highly prized qualities of a lineage. In a praise-song for the young warriors girls sing as follows:

> On a field ploughed by its owner
> may there grow no weed;
> o son of a fighting father,
> may it not be lost in you.
>
> [Not killers are like weed in the field of their lineage.]

Or even more eloquently in a similar praise-song:

> I eat, surely I eat,
> but intestines don't choke me:
> intestines are not meat.
> I praise, surely I praise,
> but I am not satisfied:
> they (the warriors concerned) are not of my lineage.

The close knit character of the lineage, too, is praised. One of the indispensable vessels of the traditional Matcha kitchen is the *wachiti,* a half spherical clay-pot, used exclusively for the preparation of *buna qala* (coffee fruits stewed in butter), a ritual closely connected with generation. Here the wachiti is seen as a symbol of the cohesiveness of the lineage as a descent-group. A song of young warriors of the same lineage:

> The *wachiti* in the backroom
> is soil and rolls of earth (put together)
> A fine sight we are together,
> o my lineage, good!
> The wachiti of the housewife
> they wash and prepare it;
> proud and eager to fight
> they (the warriors of the same lineage) fight beyond their borders and spear the enemy.
>
> [Mounted on well caparisoned horses they are dressed in fine clothes, well washed and clean.]

As well as their being of one blood and guided and guarded by the same ayana, a great factor in a lineage's cohesiveness was, especially in former times, the land they called theirs. It could not be given to others without the permission of the lineage as a whole. The ayana of this land was seen as associated from of old with the ayana of this lineage.

In former times, fathers were accustomed to teach their children all the names of all their lineage ancestors. Even if they had no reason to be particularly proud of their lineage, it was a matter of necessity in view of possible marriages that they knew not only their own ancestors but also those of others. Nowadays this general knowledge of the lineages in their area has become increasingly difficult for people, since many people have settled in the country from other parts. In addition, the many schools nowadays encourage the feeling that many customs of the past are bound to disappear.

However, a person's lineage is still a great factor in his sense of identity. As a westerner I was again and again impressed when a boy of twelve years recited the list of his ancestors back as far as the tenth generation: "My name is Gammachu son of Taka – Taka son of Desta – Desta son of Magarsa ..." and so on. Once I asked the children in an elementary school, children between 10 and 15 years (grades 3–5) to

write for me the names of their ancestors. There were 39 children who did so; the great majority. The result was: 2 x 13 names, 5 x 12 names, 1 x 11 names, 13 x 10 names, 6 x 9 names, 2 x 8 names, 1 x 7 names, 4 x 6 names, 4 x 5 names, 1 x 4 names. We were unable to check the lists but in any way it can be seen that the lineage as a proof of identity has not yet lost its importance.

7. Friendly lineages

There have always been lineages which live on particularly friendly terms with one another. The most characteristic feature of this friendly relationship is that they take their wives from one another. It creates a variety of permanent relations and contacts in everyday life.

Matcha marriages are contracted for life. If the husband dies, his lineage arranges for his widow to marry one of his brothers. For the birth of her first child a woman goes back to her parents' house. In former times, she went back also when her eldest brother brought a sacrifice for his deceased father. When her brothers performed their *butta* ritual in the frame of the *gada* system, she would be present (she followed her brothers not her husband in this respect). Both she and her husband pay visits to each other's families in case of sickness, and they attend one another's funerals. A son-in-law should always be prepared to help his wife's parents in special circumstances. Children often live for a long time with their grandparents on the mother's side.

There exists a special relationship of sympathy between children and their mother's brothers. Children often have more friendly relations with their cousins on the mother's side than with those on their father's side. Between brothers we find often some latent antagonisms, and this operates both for the father and his brothers and for the sons of the same father. There may easily be frictions here over inheritance. Such things do not exist with the family on the mother's side. The role of the women as links between lineages then is extremely important.

When speaking of these friendly relationships between their lineages, people say: "The ayana of our lineages like one another."

8. My lineage my fate

Until now we have spoken rather positively about the lineage. It is readily seen, however, from previous chapters that Matcha society

contains many lineages membership of which is experienced as a fate rather than as a privilege.

In addition, even the higher lineages normally have a number of things to hide.

In everyday life, these darker sides are usually not referred to for the sake of mutual peace. Direct reference to a person's low descent is rather rare, even at quarrels, since such 'insults' are liable to produce permanent enmities. In addition, the offender often runs a risk of being repaid in kind. Indeed, the saying: "A person's descent and what he eats are known to all" is still current in modern Matcha society. Nowadays, it is particularly with regard to marriage that a lower descent is still experienced as a fate, and even more so a dark complexion since the latter is invariably associated with descent from slaves.

I now give examples of the people's regard to one anothers' sensitivity in this matter.

A boy I knew well was the son of a man his mother had married after her first husband had died. This second husband, however, was of considerably lower social status than the first. According to custom, this boy (let me call him Alemayo) should have been called after his real father 'Alemayo N.N.'. He called himself, however, always after the father of his older brothers (thus changing his lineage) and so he was called by everyone.

When at some communal work one of the workers has a darker complexion, his companions will avoid singing songs in which slaves are derided or even mentioned.

My research caused me regularly to ask my assistants about a person's descent. If it was not particularly honourable, they were always somewhat reluctant to tell me. Especially in the beginning of our working together, they feared that I would pass on their information to the parish priest. If ever their parish priest would show himself informed about it, people might well trace his knowledge to their cooperation with me. This could well result for them in a bitter confrontation with the person concerned and the general animosity of all the people.

In 1969 I was carrying out a survey of some 300 houses – a research which included a search for the people's descent. Since the local priest was helping me in many ways, it was natural that we discussed this research in general terms. What I told him increased his interest and he started making some inquiries of his own. One of the first people he asked regarding various lineages in his parish was his most trusted

church-elder. The latter's reply was: "Father, if I tell you such things, will it make me a better Christian?" Here the matter ended.

What was said about the information I gathered in regard to the despised castes of artisans, holds good also for people of lower lineages. When speaking of these people's descent, my informants were always cautious not to be overheard.

The people's attitude of regard for one another's sensitivity on this issue is supported by religious views: Everybody has his own ayana and this personal ayana shares with many others one and the same lineage-ayana. All ayana are something of Waqa. So there are sayings such as these:

> "If you laugh at someone who is very black or has slave-hair Waqa punishes you by giving you children of the same kind."
>
> "Waqa had a purpose when he made that person as he is. If you mock at such a person, you mock at Waqa.
> It's that person's ayana who made him as he is."

9. Some final remarks

In this chapter we have said that the concept of a *balballa* (a word we translated as 'lineage') is that of a descent group of one and the same blood, exogamous and comprising nine generations. This held true whenever my informants tried to explain to me the difference between a *balballa* and a *qomo* (a word I translated as 'clan'). So did, for instance, Gammachu Magarsa when he said: "First we have the balballa. What comes after the balballa is qomo."

It should, however, be noticed that in daily speech

a. people nearly always use the word 'qomo' when they speak of a descent group, also when they have their balballa in mind;
b. the word 'balballa' is also used for a lineage of more than nine generations; accordingly they say also that one can marry within one's own balballa, provided the law of the nine generations is upheld.

In speaking of the borana, we saw that they are regarded as being of pure Oromo descent, as a link with the pure beginning, and as such as the channels of all blessings from Waqa; but we also saw that this pure descent is, at least to a certain extent, a fiction, and that people are well aware of this.

The same applies in general to the lineage as an exogamous group of nine generations. Here, again, fiction plays a part, and people are well aware of it. They know well that the genealogical tree they construct in order to account for nine generations may well be historically false. But they are simply not interested in history as a value in itself. Oral tradition is passed on for the sake of the living.

According to their concept of man and his world they need borana and they need lineages of nine generations. Whether all details given in their genealogical tree are historically true is irrelevant, and anyhow, impossible to trace or to prove.

It brings to mind the words of Shoi Robe, 'the wisest man Sayo ever knew' as people say.

It is said that this Shoi Robe on one occasion, after mentioning his father, casually added: "... *If* he is my father." Very surprised someone asked: "But is Robe then not your father?" To which Shoi Robe smilingly answered: "Nobody knows who my father is unless it is my mother."

Chapter 21

RITUALS OF PURIFICATION AFTER HOMICIDE

Blood is what pounds and pulsates. It demonstrates life. It has life. One could even say, in a sense, it is life. Life, however, is conferred by Waqa and is under his dominion.

This is a fairly accurate picture of the Matcha's idea of blood in general. It does not explain, however, the fear they have of the human blood they shed – a fear that is greater with them than with many other peoples who have a similar view of blood and life.

The Matcha are fighters and killers. Since olden times killing a man brought honour. They also have the law of blood for blood and the obligation of blood-vengeance. But we also see that in most cases the killer can make peace again, that he can wash the blood from his hands, that he can substitute other blood for his own, and that he can add a blood-price to this to be paid in cattle.

Over and over again fighting and killing occurred, yet always peace was made. Indeed, the custom of a permanent feud between two families, the situation of endless mutual killing which among other peoples sometimes leads to the extinction of entire groups, is still unknown among them.

I shall not try to explain this, but will simply mention one important idea of theirs in this connection. It is the conviction that Waqa does not bless them, if they are not at peace one with another. 'Peace' here does not so much mean friendly feelings as respect for other people as Waqa's creatures who are under his dominion. Waqa demands from them that they uphold *saffu* in regard to each other, which means in this connection, respect for the fact that Waqa gave that man a place under the sun and that Waqa withdraws from anyone who kills someone else, except in self-defence. Though shedding of blood is seen as a condition for procreation the Matcha also uphold the view that killing a man is a violation of the world-order as given by Waqa.

This view also includes people who are not Oromo, and Oromo who have been expelled from their clan. There is only one difference here: the 'naga Oromo – peace of the Oromo' is not broken in their case; hence a ritual of peacemaking with the victim's family is not required.

For man-slaughter within Matcha society the law is operative that not only the killer and his family but their whole lineage is involved and that the same holds good for the victim's party.

In the next chapter we will describe the peacemaking ritual between the two lineages. Here we are concerned with the ritual the killer has to perform as soon as possible for *personal* reasons, i. e. in order to protect himself and his nearest of kin from the dangers which threaten them immediately and directly because of the blood he has shed.

1. The killer and the blood he shed

> "We are not speaking here of a man who attacks you. If you kill such a man there is no *'dhiga dhangalasu* – bloodshed'. His blood is like the blood of a dog. We only say *'dhiga dhangalasu'* when a man is killed who had no intention of killing you. We only use this expression when human blood is involved.
> Only then we say of the killer that 'he has blood on his hands'. People are very afraid of hands stained with blood."
>
> (Shagerdi Bukko)

> "If, after killing, he does not wash his hands immediately with other blood, Waqa will strike him with leprosy or madness."
>
> (Mirresa Gamtesa)

> "His family, too, may be struck at the same time: his brothers and sisters, his wife and his children. Even if he washes the blood from his hands, the blood he shed may strike later on his children and grandchildren. I know several families where the grandchildren were struck by misfortune, because their grandfather killed a man."
>
> (Gammachu Magarsa)

> "When a man has killed another man and some member of his family becomes leprous or mad or is struck repeatedly by misfortune, our people still say: 'This happened to him because there is blood in his family.' "
>
> (Mirresa Gamtesa)

When, after these words, I asked Mirresa: "Can you tell me the name of the man you have in mind?", he replied: "Father, I would prefer not to mention his name. So many people are telling me many things from their heart; they are so kind to me; I do not want to abuse their confidence."

Certainly any specific case of man-slaughter remains a topic most difficult to touch upon.

"They kill a man for the sake of honour and this they should do. But they are afraid; they are afraid of his blood. Much more than you, Father, I feel in the words and attitude of an informant whether he is really afraid of the blood he shed. When they have killed someone, they never tell others the way they did it. They will tell how they killed a buffalo, but never how they killed a man. When, in the old days, they were expected to sing their killer's song, they would simply say: 'I killed a man', but for the rest they would not say a word about it.

Recently, I was at court. I saw there a man who was brought before the judge; he had killed another man. Everyone was afraid and kept their distance from him. Their fear was of the blood on his hands.

On the radio I heard of people who kill without any fear; we Oromo are not like this. We are very afraid of blood, not because we are cowards but because blood is very dangerous. We are not afraid of the blood of a buffalo, at least only a little, but a man's blood – that is different. The killer must wash the blood from his hands as soon as possible, because the blood of a man is much more dangerous even than that of a lion.

I think it is as with Cain and Abel: the blood of a man cries to Waqa from the earth. The earth drank that blood."

(Mirresa Gamtesa)

Indeed, the whole of creation is expected to react to such a murder.

"I spoke with an old man, Jigo. He told me: 'It happened that a man had killed another man. He had killed him near a *horra* (a spring of mineral water considered as holy). He washed his hands in the horra. From that day onwards, the horra stopped flowing. The cattle could no longer drink there.' Jigo did not want to tell me the name of that man." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

To see human blood frightens people, even when bleeding is only slight.

"When two boys fought and some blood was shed, there should be a ritual of peacemaking with *tchokorsa* grass (a symbol of peace). For instance, suppose my son has fought with Ensermu's son, and there was blood. Then I, Asafa, will to to Ensermu's house and we will have a talk with some elders under a

tree. It must be done under a tree. I say: 'I will pay the doctor.' After this, Ensermu and I make peace with one another. The elders now call the boys and ask them why they were fighting. Then they say to the boys that they must make peace. They have tchokorsa grass brought to them. They divide this tchokorsa into two parts and give one part to each boy. Then the boys exchange their tchokorsa and put it in their hair. They must not take it out of their hair themselves; they must leave it until il falls out of itself." (Asafa Disasa)

2. Halu basu

The ritual of 'washing the blood from one's hands' is also called by a more general name *'halu basu* – taking away the *halu'*. *'Halu'* can mean many different things, but always indicates something bad. In this case it is best described as a condition of vulnerability to threats by evil powers. Halu basu rituals usually consist in walking through some plants which are planted in the ground for this purpose. The passage is kept narrow, so that the person must touch the plants whose ayana is believed to take away the *halu.*

Waqa, the killer's personal ayana and his lineage's ayana are believed to withdraw from him, leaving him to the vengeance of his victim's ayana and the ayana of his victim's lineage who, in their turn, use diseases (in former times 'evil ayana', nowadays 'setana') such as blindness, leprosy, or craziness to strike him.

"Waqa is angry with him as is the ayana of the man he killed and the ayana of that man's lineage and they wish to harm him by striking him with blindness or leprosy." (Gammachu Magarsa)

3. Bloodshed within the lineage

In this case the killer's blood and the blood of his victim are the same. So the law of 'blood for blood' does not apply. To put it in other words: there is no sense in washing off one's own blood with one's own blood.

"Helped by his kinsfolk, the killer digs a deep tunnel under a tree with long roots. While doing so, he must wear the clothes in which he killed. Under the ground he himself cuts one of the roots lengthwise; after this he creeps through that root. He must creep on his belly and take care to touch both halves of the root.

When he comes out, he does not look back. In this way, the *halu* will stay behind in the ground.
While he is doing this, all his kinsfolk pray: 'O Waqa, take this *halu* away from him.' " (Waquma Tollera)

The word for root is *'hidda'*, but 'hidda' also means 'vein'. A lineage can be seen as a cluster of roots, but these roots are also carriers of the same blood, and outwardly a vein is like a root. The root then is a symbol of the lineage.

The lineage was split by the killer: therefore he has to cut the root himself and 'in the clothes he wore when he killed'. While creeping through, he has to touch both halves of the root, thus making it one again. He must pass through on his belly, a symbol of death: he gives life for life.

He does not look back: to look back is to re-establish contact. It is a ritual device we find also in other rituals of this nature. The kinsfolk present are only people of his own lineage; no kinsfolk on his mother's side will be there.

They must pray for him:

"How could he pray himself? His tongue is tied by bloodshed; he has cut himself off from his people: his lineage's ayana has withdrawn from him. How then can he pray to Waqa?" (Gammachu Magarsa)

"Only after this ritual is he allowed to enter his house and to accept food from other people's hands. If they had allowed him to enter their house before, all of them would have been struck by sickness and death." (Waquma Tollera)

4. Bloodshed outside the lineage

The creeping-through-the-root ritual can be seen as a substitute for the ritual we are about to describe now.

As well both rituals are brought together in the following account of Shagerdi Bukko:

"There are roots, long roots of a tree. Such a root must be cut lengthwise and the killer has to creep through. But this is only done when he has killed somebody of his own blood. When he

has killed a man of other blood, he must first kill a little black ant, cut it in two and pass between the halves.
As soon as possible after this he kills a sheep, cuts it in two and passes between the halves. This is called *'qupha'*. Until he has done this, he cannot accept any food from anyone's hands. He does not eat the qupha sheep; it is thrown away after. He only washes his hands in the blood."

"He must cut the sheep in two and wash the hands which perpetrated the killing in the blood. After this, he passes between taking care to touch both halves. He cannot enter a house before he has killed the *qupha.* If he did so everyone in that house would die. He must kill the qupha dressed in the clothes he wore when he killed." (Waquma Tollera)

"When after killing an ant the killer sees a sheep, he can kill that sheep even without asking its owner. The colour of the sheep does not matter. It should, however, be a *qupha*, a female past bearing." (Shagerdi Bukko)

"*Qupha* means an animal that is of less value than others. Take the case of three lambs, born on the same day from the same mother. Two grow well, the third one lags behind in every way. Such a laggard is called *'qupha'*. The animal which is killed by the killer must be of minor value, since it is not eaten. It is only killed for the sake of its blood, used for washing the hands."
(Beqele Lamu)

The meat of an old female is less good to eat than that of a younger sheep. While rams are always killed before they have grown old, ewes are left as long as they can bear. Killing a cow or an ewe before the animal is past bearing is regarded as a sin. Normally the killer will be at pains to find a suitable sheep. As well he needs some kinsfolk to pray for him.

Shagerdi's remark that he can take such a sheep without the owner's permission does not mean that he does not pay for it.

Cutting the sheep in two renders it unfit to be eaten.

"All animals that are eaten must have their throat cut to drain the blood together. With the blood the animal's ayana also escapes. It is something of Waqa, it is life. Life belongs to Waqa.

So it is that we lift up the sheep that all its blood may drain away." (Gammachu Magarsa)

The symbolic meaning of this cutting in two is the same as that of the root: the killer has separated, has split that which was one.

"By touching the two halves of the sheep he makes them one again. By lying on his belly he shows that he is dead." (Gammachu Magarsa)

Thus far the sheep symbolizes the people's unity. However, this does not prevent the Matcha from regarding the sheep's blood as symbolizing the killer's blood as well.

"When a Danqa clansman had killed an Abbichu, he would kill a sheep. This means: I am free from the blood; my hands have been cleansed. He gave something to replace what he had taken; he returned the blood he had shed." (Dinsa Sarba)

"The sheep's blood is certainly the killer's. He can only wash off the blood of the man he killed with his own blood." (Gammachu Magarsa)

Other points of view extend the symbolism:

"The sheep must be a *qupha,* a weak animal, an animal of minor value, because the killer wants to show that he is very weak and of no value in Waqa's eyes, just like the little ant. The animal should be a ewe, because women connect two lineages." (Gammachu Magarsa)

As with the creeping-through-the-root ritual the killer also needs his kinsfolk to pray for him:

"He calls his kinsfolk and asks them: 'Please, pray to Waqa for me.' And his kinsfolk will pray: 'O Waqa, take this *halu* away from him. We ourselves have forgiven him his deed. O Waqa, do you forgive him also, because we ask you for this.'
After they have done all these things they throw the sheep away, and also the knife with which it was killed; and they go away without turning to look back." (Beqele Lamu)

Animals of peace

Though, sometimes, a cock is killed, the ideal qupha animal is a sheep.

> "It should be a sheep, since the sheep is an animal of peace. A sheep brings peace to people. It does no harm to man; a man feels safe in the midst of even many sheep."
>
> (Gammachu Magarsa)

But if the killer cannot find a sheep (and kinsfolk to pray for him) immediately, he first tears an ant in half as a temporary substitute for the sheep. His deadly fear of the blood he has shed induces him to do this.

> "It should be a little black ant, a *chifi* or a *donda.* These little black ants have no evil in them. They have no poison; they do not bite man. So it is that we call ourselves little black ants when we pray to Waqa.
> In former times, when the little rains failed to come, our people went out to the road, men and women. There they would pray: 'O Waqa, we are your little black ants.' They say so to make themselves small in Waqa's sight, and to show that they are peaceful towards one another.
> Large ants are poisonous; they bite people. They are therefore not suitable for qupha." (Waquma Tollera)

The ants' black colour endears them to Waqa who himself is also called 'the dark-coloured Waqa'. But for the qupha ritual this dark colour is only incidental. The fact that they do not harm man is decisive in making choice of them. Another informant assured me: "Little red ants are also good, because they, too, do no harm to people."

Final remark

Man-slaughter for the sake of honour as a general custom is something of the past now, but I am sure that the qupha ritual is still performed occasionally, when somebody has killed another person. Fear of the human blood is still deep-seated among the people.

The same fear was at the origin of the age-old custom of executing criminals without shedding their blood. In most cases they were drowned.

If they deserved a harsher punishment, they were buried except for their head. Their head was shaved, and salt was put on the scalp, after which the cattle were allowed to lick it off until death ensued. There were also other methods of execution, but always without bloodshed.

Oral tradition abounds in stories about the petty kings of the nineteenth century, among others Jote, who used to administer justice independently from the gada judges, but nevertheless adhered to the same custom when disposing of their adversaries, after they had captured them. As well as drowning them hanging was introduced, a way of capital punishment hitherto unknown. In this way the executioners did not stain their hands with human blood.

Chapter 22

PEACEMAKING AFTER MANSLAUGHTER

This chapter concerns the manner of making peace when a man had killed 'unknowingly' someone of another lineage.

The description of this elaborate ritual as given by my older informants refers to a time when the gada was still somewhat active as a ritual system.

1. The law of mutual avoidance

> "Even if the people concerned were previously on friendly terms with one another, they now must stop talking, trading and eating with each other. They could no longer drink from the same river. They could no longer herd their cattle together. They had to forget all friendship there was between them, until peace had been made. If they failed to do this, they would contract leprosy. The law applied to the whole of both lineages."
>
> (Waquma Tollera)
>
> [In fact the two lineages as a whole were only involved in so far as they lived in the same area.]

The killer's plight

After having performed the qupha-ritual, for which he needed his kinsfolk, he could do one of two things: he could stay at home or flee away to some relatives, living at distance.

> "If he stayed at home, he could not sleep in the backroom with the others. He could not sleep with women. He kept himself wrapped in his *shamma* (a wide shawl) against the evil eye. If people of the dead man's lineage sought to kill him, men of his own lineage would guard him day and night. All these things had to be done, until peace was made at the river."

It took a long time before this was achieved. But as soon as the peace negotiations began his life was no longer in danger, at least according to the law. But this, too, could take time, and, therefore, he would sometimes flee away to some distant relatives and keep himself hidden there, until the peace negotiations were well under the way.

2. Request for peace

Meanwhile his family would send some elders to the other party in order to appeal for reconciliation. At least two of these intermediaries must be *gula.* If possible one of them had to be a former *gada*-judge, a specialist in law. These two men, in their turn, would chose some assistants. The whole group had to be of another lineage than the people involved in the blood-feud.

Whatever previous relations between the two parties had been, the victim's party never yielded immediately to the request. First, they must show their grief; second, they wished to make as much as possible of the blood-price.

Accordingly, the request was repeated several times. The resistance of the victim's party could be such that the others had to call in the help of the *kallacha.* The kallacha (see chapter 16, 6a) was an iron object, guarded by one particular borana lineage in every clan. People believed that this kallacha came from heaven, at least in the sense that the iron from which it was fashioned came down from heaven by means of lightning. Seen as a symbol of Waqa's anger, it was a ritual object for cursing only. This kallacha was taken solemnly to the other party's house, covered with a cloth to protect people from its influence. It was kept with *tchokorsa* grass, a symbol of peace.

It was always accompanied by a group of crippled and lame people who supported the request in their own way.

> "They would stop in front of the house and say: 'Our brother killed your brother unknowingly, as you know well. Remember that he is only a man like all of us, a man born from man. Therefore, in Waqa's name, do forgive him. Make peace.'
> If the others still persisted in their refusal, they would be cursed thus: 'Waqa's kallacha met with refusal from you, from now onwards, may your prayers be refused by him. May they no longer be heard by Waqa. May they no longer be heard by the earth. If ever you should kill this man, may killing persist in your lineage, may blood remain on your hands for ever.'
> Thus they spoke. And after this, the crippled and blind people shouted: *'Muu-muu-muuu!'* which means: 'May you grow crippled as I am. May you be blind as I am.' " (Waquma Tollera)

It would seldom, however, proceed so far. After an impressive silence, the bereaved party always ended by agreeing to peace negotiations. Their response would call down abundant blessings by the others.

It should be noted that both at the request for reconciliation and at the negotiations which follow, the two parties never address each other directly. Rather they speak through their go-betweens who are of other lineages.

3. Negotiations regarding the blood-price

> "The peace negotiations took place under a *lafto* tree. The lafto (umbrella acacia) is a tree of peace. Its branches spread far in all directions and many can sit in its shadow. Such is also the peace of the Oromo. If there is not a big lafto in the neighbourhood, they can sit under any other big tree. They choose to sit in the shadow, since the sun makes people hot-tempered. For the same reason they should sit on wet grass or wet leaves. There are always several meetings.
> The blood-price was never paid in money; always in cattle, sheep or slaves." (Waquma Tollera)

Blood-prices were fixed by law. The blood-price for a borana was higher than that for a gabaro, and the blood-price for a gabaro was higher than for someone like a blacksmith. I once heard of a blood-price for a borana which was thirty head of cattle. There would be differences according to the gada-areas. They were never claimed to the limit. The victim's party had to manifest not only their social standing and their grief but also their willingness to make peace for the benefit of the country at large.

> "In the beginning of the negotiations there were always three gada-judges. If one of the parties did not agree with the final decision of these judges, they could appeal to five judges, and after this, even to nine. But against the decision of the nine there was no further appeal." (Waquma Tollera)

Anyone who knows something of the endless talk people can delight and indulge in – talk at which one elder after an other puts his point of view based on his knowledge of similar cases in the past, will expect a rather protracted series of meetings to take place.

The final meeting

> "After the final decision was pronounced, they conveyed a special meeting. At this meeting anyone of either party could be

present, since there would be no further decision after this. Only the killer himself and his closest relatives together with the victim's nearest relatives would be absent." (Waquma Tollera)

The meeting had the character of a general announcement, and also set a ritual seal on the peace negotiations. It is again Waquma Tollera who gives us the following record in an interview with his son Ensermu.

Ens.: "Tell me, my father, what words of the law they say on this occasion."
WT.: "First they pray.
There is an open space between the parties. In this space the *gula* of both parties stand. After the gula of the victim's party have prayed with their people, those of the other party will say a similar prayer. Everyone else is sitting.
The first gula says:
G.: 'O Waqa you helped us; praise be to you.'
After which everyone repeats:
P.: 'PRAISE BE TO YOU.'
G.: 'We have finished these negotiations; praise be to you.'
P.: 'PRAISE BE TO YOU.'
G.: 'We talked and became reconciled with one another; praise be to you.'
P.: 'PRAISE BE TO YOU.'
G.: 'Since these people have made peace, praise be to you.'
P.: 'PRAISE BE TO YOU.'
G.: 'Since they did not kill each another, praise be to you.'
P.: 'PRAISE BE TO YOU.'
G.: 'Since there is only peace and love now, praise be to you.'
P.: 'PRAISE BE TO YOU.'

After this, they ask Waqa's blessing. One gula is standing to the east and the other to the west, and they are facing one another. The gula who is standing to the west (2) starts speaking. He says to his companion (1):
2.: 'Come.'
And the other answers:
1.: 'I have come.'
2.: 'As you have come, may peace come to the country.'

[All people join in the answers. Gula 1 is always a borana; all blessing comes to the people through the borana.]

P.: 'MAY IT COME.'
1.: 'Blessing be to Sayo.'
P.: 'SO BE IT.'
1.: 'May Waqa give rain.'
P.: 'MAY HE GIVE.'
1.: 'May the earth give grass.'
P.: 'MAY IT GIVE.'
1.: 'May there be grass for the cattle.'
P.: 'MAY THERE BE.'
1.: 'May there be cattle for the owners.'
P.: 'MAY THERE BE.'
1.: 'May the earth's back be bare of grass' (grazed away by many cattle).
P.: 'MAY IT BE BARE.'
1.: 'May the drinking-places be muddy' (from many cattle).
P.: 'MAY THEY BE MUDDY.'
1.: 'May disease and war vanish from the country.'
P.: 'MAY THEY VANISH.'
1.: 'May lasting peace be given to us.'
P.: 'MAY IT BE GIVEN TO US.'
1.: 'May our mutual agreement bring us blessing.'
P.: 'MAY IT BRING BLESSING.'
1.: 'Such are my words. What do you say, my friend?'
2.: 'Your words are good. May good come to these people (the two parties).'
P.: 'MAY GOOD COME TO THEM.'
2.: 'May what is evil disappear from between them.'
P.: 'MAY IT DISAPPEAR.'
2.: 'May they be given peace.'
P.: 'MAY THEY BE GIVEN PEACE.'

After this the second gula who is standing on the west-side repeats the decision of the judges: 'Lineage such and such have made peace with lineage such and such, after N.N. killed N.N. He killed him unknowingly. So we applied the law of Makko Billi: If the killer is not a bad man, if he killed unknowingly, peace will be made. We decided that the lineage of N.N. will pay to the lineage of N.N. two bulls and three cows. This is our decision. The matter is finished.'
After these words he slashes his whip.

The first gula, the borana, now concludes with these words: 'The law for peacemaking has been fulfilled. Waqa listened to it sitting. The gula has beaten it standing. It will keep continue to stand. It will not be wasted like water.'

But peace is still not completely restored. (They have prayed separately.) The rule of mutual avoidance still holds good and will remain so, until after the great ritual of reconciliation at the river.

4. The ritual at the river

The place at the river is carefully chosen. It is not essential that this river flows between the land of both parties but "it must be at some distance of any road". (Shagerdi Bukko)

A road is, in the Matcha's eyes, a symbol of their unity as a people: 'they go the same road'. The two parties are still not 'going the same road'. When people want to pray together to Waqa, they choose to emphasize their being at peace with one another by praying on a road.

"On the appointed day, both parties go to the chosen place at the river. It should be a place where the river is calm and placid and not deep – a place easily forded (again a symbol of peacemaking). They are led by the same gula, those ritual leaders, who conducted their negotiations. Other elders will join them to help them to pray.

The leading gula themselves have gathered *maracha* and *ulmaya* leaves to use for the sprinkling. They have also gone themselves to the *horra* to draw the pure and beneficial horra-water in calabashes. These calabashes should be new, giving the water a bitter taste.

[The peacemaking has a bitter taste.]

Only the people of the two lineages partake in the ritual.

[Women who are married into these lineages can go, but only as onlookers.]

The ritual leaders and their helpers, the killer and his near relatives and also the victim's nearest relatives must be free of sexual intercourse the night before.

The two parties approach the river from opposite sides. The killer, too, is with them, but he keeps himself entirely wrapped in a shamma, so that he may be protected from the evil eye. It also signifies that he is cut off from his people. He has bought a

qupha-sheep, a ewe past bearing. He himself has paid most of the price of this sheep, but his kinsfolk, too, must contribute. (It is a matter of the whole lineage.) Only a sheep can give peace; goats cannot. The killer must wear the clothes he wore on the day he killed. If one of the parties is borana and the other gabaro, the latter will ask some borana to join them.

As soon as the two parties have reached the river, several people will held stretched out shammas (wide shawls) between them that they may not harm one another with the evil eye. In former times, they would turn their backs to each other, or raise a smoke-screen." (Shagerdi Bukko)

The *hiddi* ritual

The hiddi plant is really a bush with fruits which are yellow and perfectly round, 2–4 cms in cross-section. [33]

Gammachu Magarsa had the following to say of the symbolism of the hiddi plant.

"*Hiddi* plants commonly grow on dry places. In spite of this they even flower in the dry season and have many fruits. We have a riddle about the six greatest wonders on earth: the first is 'the *hiddi* that grows without being fed'.

Hiddi fruits are good for our calves: we cut them in half and rub our calves' skin with them.

But as well as these good qualities, the hiddi plant bears thorns. As children we often played with the fine yellow fruits, while we were watching our sheep. We collected as many as possible of them in our clothes, put them together somewhere and counted them. 'These are my calves', we would say. But we never counted all of them, since it is not good for people to count their cattle.

At that time I did not know the deeper meaning of the hiddi fruits. I had to wait for the day my grandfather explained it to me. One day he told me: 'My grandson, I am going to tell you the secret meaning of the hiddi plants. The hiddi plants are our people. They are numerous and so are the Oromo. The hiddi keeps alive and grows in dry places and still bears much fruit. In the same way our people lived in difficult circumstances, but in

[33] A Solanum variety. Cf. Streleyn, 1973, and Haberland, 1963.

spite of this they grew and flourished. Hiddi plants are thorny: we, too, are thorny to each other. The hiddi bushes are the fathers and mothers, the bulls and the cows. The hiddi fruits are the children and calves.' Such were the words of my grandfather. Later, while I was working in eastern Oromo land not far from Shashamane, I, sometimes, stopped my car only to look at the many hiddi bushes around me and at their fine yellow fruits the colour of the morning light.

I now understand why our people, if they had neither bull nor cow nor sheep for a sacrifice, would 'kill' a hiddi-fruit by cutting it in two. What sheep are to us among the animals, hiddi-fruits are among the plants.

I also understand now, why in former times, a girl who wanted to become the second wife of a man, would go to that man's house, and there sit down on the ground and spread hiddi-fruits in front of herself as a symbol of the children she would give him."

Here is a description of the ritual in question, as given to me by an old man.

"The gula and the leading elders of both parties would put many hiddi fruits in the grass, each group on their own side of the river. After this they would kneel down behind the fruits and, creeping slowly forwards, they would roll them towards the river. The leaders of the killer's party were followed by the killer's nearest kin and so were the other leaders by the dead man's kinsfolk. The prayers they said while crawling towards the river and pushing the hiddi fruits in front of them, were like this:

[GE = gula and elders; P = people]

GE.: 'Blood has been shed. O Waqa, have mercy on us.'
P.: 'O WAQA, HAVE MERCY ON US.'
GE.: 'Now the blood-feud has gone. O Waqa, have mercy on us.'
P.: 'O WAQA, HAVE MERCY ON US.'
GE.: 'Evil thoughts have gone. O Waqa, have mercy on us.'
P.: 'O WAQA, HAVE MERCY ON US.'
GE.: 'Evil talk has gone. O Waqa, have mercy on us.'
P.: 'O WAQA, HAVE MERCY ON US.'
GE.: 'O Waqa, forgive us.'

P.: 'O WAQA, FORGIVE US.'
GE.: 'Give us your peace.'
P.: 'GIVE US YOUR PEACE.'

Thus they pray and everyone answers. Those who do not creep with them on their knees towards the river, are sitting around on the grass. In the end, the hiddi fruits from both sides mingle in the river."

The ritual is an eloquent anticipation of the peace which is about to be made between the two parties.

Introductory prayers

As the former ones they are said by both parties independently from one another.

Gula 1, a borana, is standing to the east. Gula 2 to the west. Everyone joins in the answers (P).

Apart from some minor remarks, the whole further record of the peacemaking ritual comes from Shagerdi Bukko.

"Before they kill the sheep, both lineages pray in this way:
2.: 'Come.'
1.: 'I have come.'
2.: 'In the same way you came, may peace come to the country.'
P.: 'MAY IT COME.'
1.: 'May the Sayo be blessed.'
P.: 'MAY THEY BE BLESSED.'
1.: 'May Waqa give rain.'
P.: 'MAY HE GIVE.'
1.: 'May the earth give grass.'
P.: 'MAY SHE GIVE.'
1.: 'May there be grass for the cattle.'
P.: 'MAY THERE BE.'
1.: 'May there be cattle for owners.'
P.: 'MAY THERE BE.'
1.: 'May the back of the earth be grazed far and wide.'
P.: 'MAY IT BE SO.'
1.: 'May the cattle leave the pastures bare.'
P.: 'MAY THEY LEAVE THEM BARE.'
1.: 'May the mud in the river spread far (meaning: may there be many cattle).'

P.: 'MAY IT SPREAD FAR.'
1.: 'May our cattle leave the drinking-places muddy.'
P.: 'MAY THEY LEAVE THEM MUDDY.'
1.: 'May pain in the side (a sickness) and war disappear from the country.'
P.: 'MAY THEY DISAPPEAR.'
1.: 'May Waqa give us lasting peace.'
P.: 'MAY HE GIVE US.'
1.: 'May he give us mutual agreement.'
P.: 'MAY HE GIVE US.'
1.: 'May our mutual agreement bring us blessing.'
P.: 'MAY IT BRING BLESSING.'
1.: 'O Waqa, come and cleanse us.'
P.: 'CLEANSE US.'
1.: 'From the blood that we shed, cleanse us.'
P.: 'CLEANSE US.'
1.: 'The one who died is a dead tree; the one who lives (the killer) is a living being. Will there be forgiveness for him?'
P.: 'YES, THERE WILL BE.'
1.: 'Will Waqa cleanse us?'
P.: 'YES, HE WILL.'
1.: 'Will he take away this evil thing from us (the blood-feud)?'
P.: 'YES, HE WILL.'
1.: 'Will he give us peace?'
P.: 'YES, HE WILL.'
1.: 'Will he comfort the living?'
P.: 'YES, HE WILL.'
1.: 'Will he have mercy on he who died?'
P.: 'YES, HE WILL HAVE.'

[Here we could perceive some Christian influence which makes people pray for their dead. However, it could also refer to the dead man's offspring in which he lives on.]

1.: 'Will he forgive us this blood-feud?'
P.: 'YES, HE WILL.'

[Shagerdi has given here the prayer of the killer's party.]

1.: 'Is this a matter of *saffu?*'
P.: 'YES IT IS A MATTER OF SAFFU.'

[With this the gula pass on to the recitation of the *saffu*, the Matcha's view of

the cosmic and social order as it was given to them by Waqa from the beginning. Only part of it is given here. 'Being *saffu* to one another' means having to respect one another's place in the cosmic order and in society.]

1.: 'Are father and son *saffu* to one another?'
P.: 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU.'
1.: 'Will they not pass the boundary between one another?'
P.: 'NO, THEY WILL NOT PASS IT.'
1.: 'Are mother and daughter *saffu* to one another?'
P.: 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU.'
1.: 'Will they not pass the boundary between one another?'
P.: 'NO, THEY WILL NOT.'
1.: 'Are great and small *saffu* to one another?'
P.: 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU.'
1.: 'Will they not pass the boundary between one another?'
P.: 'NO, THEY WILL NOT.'
1.: 'Are old and young *saffu* to one another?'
P.: 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU.'
1.: 'Will they not pass the boundary between one another?'
P.: 'NO, THEY WILL NOT.'
1.: 'Are mistress and slave-maid *saffu* to one another?'
P.: 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU.'
1.: 'Will they not pass the boundary between them?'
P.: 'NO, THEY WILL NOT.'
1.: 'Are brother and brother *saffu* to one another?'
P.: 'YES, THEY ARE SAFFU.'
1.: 'Will they not pass the boundary between them?'
P.: 'NO, THEY WILL NOT.'
1.: 'Whose is this *saffu?*'
P.: 'THIS SAFFU COMES FROM WAQA AND FROM THE EARTH.'

The ritual proper

Thus the people pray, each party at their own side of the river. The killer himself has taken no part in the prayer, but has kept himself hidden at a distance.

After the prayers have been said, he approaches the river, wrapped in his shamma. Together with some older kinsmen he leads the sheep to the river.

From the other side, too, now some elders come down to the river, people of the dead man's family. They cannot see the others since the shamma is still stretched between them.
The killer's party lift the sheep above the water, the head pointing downstream, and cut open its belly behind the ribs with a vertical slash on each side. After this the parties shake hands in the sheep's belly. While doing this they say: "Peace, peace, peace. Let us leave the matter in Waqa's hands." The gula sprinkle them with horra-water and with the blood of the sheep. They do this with maracha leaves. In this way the killer's nearest kin and those of the victim shake hands in the blood of the sheep, and all of them say: "Peace, peace, peace. Let the matter be left to Waqa."
It is only after they have done this that the shamma is taken away from between them.
The killer also takes off his shamma at this stage. He strips himself off all his clothes, those clothes in which he killed. They shave all his hair: the hair of his head, the hair of his eye-brows, the hair of his body. They bury these hairs under a leafy tree, where the wild animals will not find them. The killer is sprinkled with the sheep's blood and with horra-water. After this, he immerses himself into the river. When he comes out, he puts on new clothes.
All that time the gula are praying: "O Waqa, cleanse him. O Waqa, forgive him. He has acted unknowingly. O Waqa, cleanse him for us."
He washes himself further downstream from the sheep. Does the water not flow? Does it not wash off that is bad? Does it not carry it far away? The one who was killed will not rise again. The killer emerges. What is done is done.
The knife used to kill the sheep is thrown away. The sheep itself is thrown in the river, head pointing downstream. They do not eat it. They only have come to wash the blood from their hands with the sheep's blood.
During all of this, the gula are continually directing the people about what they have to say and to do.
When everything else is finished, they proclaim the law of Makko Billi, that they have fulfilled, saying:
"We fulfilled the law of Makko Billi that says:
'When somebody has shed another's blood,
when he walked beside the road,

but when he did so unknowingly,
he should be washed and immersed.
Such is the law of Makko Billi;
it continues to stand; it is not wasted like water.'
Thus they speak and they slash the whip."

Final prayers

One of the gula prays again saying:
(P = people)

G.: 'This was a deed done beside the road. Will Waqa forgive the man who killed?'
P.: 'YES, HE WILL FORGIVE HIM.'
G.: 'Will Waqa have mercy?'
P.: 'YES, HE WILL HAVE MERCY.'
G.: 'Is the matter finished with this?'
P.: 'YES, IT IS FINISHED.'
G.: 'Is not the one who died a dead tree?'
P.: 'YES, HE IS.'
G.: 'Will Waqa grant life to the one who remains alive?'
P.: 'YES, HE WILL GRANT LIFE.'
G.: 'Will the (the two parties) no longer look at each other with hatred in their eyes?'
P.: 'NO, THEY WILL NOT.'
G.: 'Will they no longer look at each other with hatred in their eyes when they are together at a feast?'
P.: 'NO, THEY WILL NOT.'
G.: 'Will they not look at each other with hatred in their eyes when they come together at the horra (to water their cattle)?'
P.: 'NO, THEY WILL NOT.'
G.: 'Will they not look at each other with hatred in their eyes when they set out fighting the enemy?'
P.: 'NO, THEY WILL NOT.'
G.: 'So, this matter is really finished?'
P.: 'IT IS REALLY FINISHED.'
G.: 'O Waqa, you have forgiven us this evil conduct,
you sprinkled us with your own hands
you sprinkled us with your maracha,
you cleansed us with your breath,
will we not say thanks to you?'
P.: 'YES, WE THANK YOU.'

G.: 'So, after putting an end to this evil affair, will it no longer be remembered?'
P.: 'NO, IT WILL NOT BE REMEMBERED.'
G.: 'Will there be no question about it anymore?'
P.: 'NO, THERE WILL BE NO QUESTION ABOUT IT.'
G.: 'Will no one return to it?'
P.: 'NOBODY WILL RETURN TO IT.'
G.: 'So, the matter is finished now?'
P.: 'YES, IT IS FINISHED.'

After this they slash the whip again.

[A similar prayer is said by a gula of the other party.]

On the same day, they all go to the house of the victim's party. They slaughter a bull there and cut the meat in long strips. They hang these strips on branches and roast them over the fire. Both parties have also made nine *qitta* (small flat loaves of bread, nearly tasteless, made from flour and water. It is not a feastmeal; there is still a 'taste of grief' in this meal). They cut these little loaves of both parties into pieces and mix them. They eat from one another's hands; they put these small pieces of *qitta* in one another's mouth. They also eat from the same plates. While drinking beer, they say:
'O Waqa, prevent this water (a word often used for beer but only by the one who serves it) from harming us.
Prevent this bread from harming us.
When we drink from the same jar, may it do us good.
Keep the need for avoidance away from between us.
Keep away the blood-feud from between us.
Grant us your peace, o Waqa.
Destroy for ever the evil that existed between us,'

[They feel themselves blessed because they have made peace with one another. This very peace ritual can turn into a curse, however, if they act as if it had never been performed.]

After this communal meal, the victim's party is invited in their turn to the killer's house, where a similar meal takes place.
If one of the houses is too distant, they eat somewhere in the open, but always on a somewhat difficult and inhospitable place such as a slope."

[Such a difficult site emphasizes like the tasteless little leaves that the meal is not a feastmeal.]

If, after this, one of the parties begins to fight again, their whole lineage will perish.

Some remarks

1. That everyone in the two lineages could take part in the ritual is only partly true in a sense. According to Matcha concepts, unmarried people can only be onlookers. As Mirresa Gamtesa phrased it:

> "Only married people take part,
> unmarried people are not 'full' (not socially adult)."

This holds good for all rituals. Though boys and girls can freely mix with the others, they have no part in the efficacy of the ritual.

2. An important remark of my assistant Gammachu:

> "You must not forget that there are not two but three parties. The third party is Waqa with whom peace is made, too, and through whom people make peace with each other."

3. When borana participate in such a ritual and have to kill a sheep – which they are forbidden to do – they apply the ritual device of saying: "*Fancho nuf hatau* – May it (the transgression of the law) turn to something good for us."

It is a device the Matcha commonly use when they are confronted with the necessity of making a choice between two contrasting obligations. To give another example. When a cow has given birth, the milk cannot leave the house before the ritual of thanksgiving has been performed. But if a sick neighbour or a pregnant woman needs the milk badly, it is always given with the words: "May it turn to something good for us."

4. During my ten years of research, I never heard of any such peace-making ritual between lineages in the area to the west of Dembidollo. Cases of manslaughter were brought before the government court. The borana were still protesting against this new custom; but even Shagerdi Bukko, who is not a borana, once remarked:

"Why do people go to the judge for so many things? It is our own fault, if we do. Does the government ask us to come?"

This does not mean, however, that the ritual is never performed at any rate, at least in a modified form and without the participation of the lineages as a whole.

Beyond my own area of research but still in western Matchaland, I was told two years ago of such a peacemaking ritual taking place between two Catholic families, Christians for several generations. It says much about the tenacity of Oromo traditions, that such people felt compelled to make peace in the traditional way. They called for some older men in the remote interior who were still familiar with the ritual. With their help they performed the ritual at the river. Even a priest, a brother of the killer, took part in it. When, after the ritual at the river, the two parties came together for the shared meal, they first sat facing one another for a long time, without saying a word. Finally the killer's party broke the silence: "Forgive us. Are we not Christians? Forgive us." But the others persevered in maintaining silence. After some time, the priest insisted again: "Let us leave the matter to Waqa." It was only then that the victim's family answered: "Yes, let us leave it to Waqa. May he forgive you. May he bless you." After which they began to eat together.

One of the victim's sisters, a nun, had not been able to take part in the ritual since she was sick. Later, the killer's brother, the priest, went to her house. First he sat in front of her for a time. Then he said: "You know why I have come. Please, forgive us in the name of Waqa. Are we not all of us Christians? You are even a nun. So, in the name of Jesus Christ, forgive us." But, here too, he first met with silence. The sick nun slowly took her cross in her hands and kept on staring at it for a long time. Eventually she, too, said: "Let us leave it to Waqa." After they ate and drank something together.

The story sheds a light of its own on the need for the victim's family to show their grief. Christianity has not changed this. I think the attitude of these two Christian families was well captured by another Christian Oromo:

"Our fathers had the *kallacha,* we have the cross.
Our fathers said: Forgive him because he acted unknowingly:
Christ on the cross prayed his Father: 'Forgive them since they know not what they do.'

Our fathers said: 'Waqa will withdraw from anyone who breaks the peace with others.' Christ says: 'My Father will not forgive you your sins if you do not forgive others from your heart.' "

5. Once an old informant told me: "The peacemaking at the river is also a *qupha* ritual." And indeed, much of the qupha ritual is found here. In a way, here too, the sheep is cut in two, but instead of creeping between the two halves, people shake hands as a symbol of the peace that is made in the blood of the sheep which symbolizes the killer's. The old man saw yet another symbol: "While they shake their hands in the sheep's belly, the sheep must still be alive." Which means that the ayana of the sheep as an animal of peace should still be there to ensure the efficacy of the ritual.

6. An additional remark of Gammachu Magarsa:

"At the communal meal at the house of the victim's party a bull is slaughtered. While this is done, the killer takes some blood of that bull in his mouth and spits it out. The bull is he himself. He wants to express that he would have been prepared to die, if the others had not allowed him to stay alive.
In order to express both their grief and caution the victim's party does not allow the others to start eating immediately. First both parties keep silent for a long while, facing one another. It is only after the victim's party has said: 'Waqayo bira hahafu – Let the matter be left with Waqa', that they start eating."

PART FIVE

VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS, RITES, AND VALUES

Chapter 23

KILLING AND BEARING

We have now heard Matcha people telling us that killing is good, that it bestows honour, and that this is the case even when human blood is shed. But we also heard them saying that human blood is dangerous and that 'a man with blood on his hands' has to cleanse himself from it as soon as possible.

In this chapter we will consider another view of bloodshed – a view which connects it with generation. Indeed, shedding of another's blood on the man's part and shedding of her own blood by the woman are seen by both of them as a condition, a strict requirement for having children. For the woman this bloodshed (seen as passive in her case) occurs through menstruation and sexual intercourse. For the man (his is seen as an active role) it happens at any sexual intercourse (but particularly when maiden-blood is shed) and by the killing of other living beings. For men this killing bestows honour, whether men or big game are slain, since such exploits, normally, ask for courage. For the women the shedding of their own blood brings honour, whenever it is associated with the pains and risks of childbirth.

In all these forms shedding her own blood on the women's part and bloodshed on the part of the men are seen as connected with one another, as is clear in the following double prayer:

"Dhabdan haajesu;	Who did not kill, may he kill;
dhabdun hadesu.	who did not bear, may she bear.

In everyday life their concern for honour prevails over their consciousness of fulfilling a cosmic law. Their rituals, however, speak another language. Here, too, the element of honour is very evident, but as well there is the universal law of the need of bloodshed for both sexes in view of generation.

1. The 'sarara' ritual

Nowadays, the Christian Matcha keep the so-called 'Masqal-feast'. 'Masqal' is an Amharic word and means 'cross'. It is a feast, based on the legendary finding of the holy cross by the empress Helena, celebrated some days after the official Ethiopian new-year in September.

At this feast 'masqal trees' are erected in all neighbourhoods – 'trees' consisting of several thin saplings together with their leaves. The stems meet at the top on which is fixed a bunch of yellow masqal flowers. Wherever there is a church, the priests bless this masqal tree, after which the people make a bonfire of it around which they dance and sing. The Matcha have enriched this Christian festival with many rites of their own, most of which have the characteristics of a new-year ritual. They say that their fathers, too, lit a fire at new-year (which probably occurred earlier in September). They also say that their own traditional ritual was performed not in the evening (as is the masqal ritual) but in the early morning while the day was still young.Accordingly, they still perform a ritual in the morning. They go to the spot where, the evening before, the masqal tree was set on fire. Men and boys only take part, women and girls stay at home; it is a specifically male ritual.

First they inspect the ashes to see if they have remained untouched during the night and they curse anyone who has trodden on them. (In their eyes this is always the work of wizards.) The untouched ashes symbolize a perfect new beginning.

After this, some outstanding men from the neighbourhood, killers of big game, begin to walk round the ashes, pointing their spears (never guns) towards the centre of the ashes where the yet unburned stumps are still hidden. These unburned stumps of the masqal tree are called *'kormomsa'*, a word connected with *'korma* – male'.

While going around the ashes, they mention in series the animals they have killed, starting from the lowest like lizards and rats and gradually going up unto big antelopes, buffaloes, lions, and elephants.

The morning I witnessed this ritual there were four of them. Every time one of them mentioned his kill, he lifted his spear, pointing towards the centre of the ashes. This pointing was accompanied by a rapid vibration of the spear. While doing this they said: "*Sararararrraaa*" mentioning an animal they had killed. The song was extremely simple and as a song was hardly worth calling by that name. It was started by the oldest man present, the youngest singing last.

1. *Sarara...*
   An animal under the granary
   that eats my grain,
   the enemy of my wife
   a rat I killed.

2. *Sarara...*
Instead of the rat you say you killed
I hit a *goresa* (colobus monkey) on its head
and killed him.

3. *Sarara...*
Instead of the *goresa* you say you killed
the one who steals our maize,
a *tota* monkey I killed.

4. *Sarara...*
Instead of the *tota* monkey you killed
the one who eats our *kotcho* (false banana),
a porcupine I killed.

1. *Sarara...*
Instead of the porcupine you killed
the one who eats our chicks,
a wild cat I killed.

2. *Sarara...*
Instead of that wild cat you killed
the one who is that hard to hit,
a dik-dik (dwarf antelope) I killed.

3. *Sarara...*
Instead of the dik-dik you killed
the one with sharp horns,
a *bosonu* (a bigger antelope) I killed.

4. *Sarara...*
Instead of that *bosonu* you killed
the one who eats our potatoes,
a wild pig I killed.

1. *Sarara...*
Instead of the wild pig you killed
the enemy of the little lambs,
a baboon I killed.

2. *Sarara...*
Instead of that baboon you killed
the one with his huge teeth,
a wart-hog I killed.

[Here number 3 fell out, he had no bigger animal to mention.]

4. *Sarara...*
Instead of that wart-hog you killed
the one with hair like dew,
a buffalo cow I killed.

1. *Sarara...*
Instead of the buffalo cow you killed
the one with fiery eyes,
a young buffalo bull I killed.

2. *Sarara...*
Instead of the young buffalo bull you killed
the one with his big horns,
a full grown buffalo I killed.

[The three last killers imitated the bellowing of a buffalo.]

Comment

a) It is evident here that it is killing as such that counts, regardless of the size of the animal or the danger incurred.

b) No pride in personal achievement is manifest; no description of the hardships suffered in the wilderness or any detail about the way the animal was killed are included. This is in marked contrast to personal triumph-songs of killers. It is forbidden to sing them on this occasion.

c) The very participation of a man who had killed no higher animal than a wild pig (too little for a triumph-song) is also significant in this respect.

d) The second man was by far the greatest killer in the area; he had killed two elephants, which are counted to be more than lions. But he did not mention them. When personal achievement is usually a source of boasting, such reticence is abnormal.

e) The pointing with the spear at the centre of the ashes, at the *'kormomsa'*, signifies the connection between the killings and manhood.

f) The whole *sarara*-ritual has to be regarded in terms of a new-year ritual, where people pray for fertility for themselves, their cattle, and their crops. It exhibits the value of killing as a universal law for men in association with fertility and generation.

2. *The wedding ritual*

A grass-plate and sprouting grains

On his wedding-day the groom takes his bride home accompanied by singing and dancing. If the traditional ritual is adhered to, the girl has with her a grass-plate (*gundo*), which she has made herself. This *gundo* is a symbol of her womb. Since, according to Matcha custom, she is expected to be a virgin, nothing should have been put in this grass-plate beforehand. Gundo are plaited from the outside inwards, leaving a little hole in the centre.

> "This little hole is not filled in by the girls themselves, but they ask a mother of children to do it for them. If they do it themselves, they fear they will close their womb to child-bearing."
> (Shagerdi Bukko)

> "Seated on a mule (in former times always on a fertile mare) the bride is walked three times round the house, after which she enters it.
> She hands her gundo to her mother-in-law who puts some sprouting barley-grains in it. They are (a symbol of) the children Waqa will give her if he will.
> The gundo is the mother's womb and those grains sprout in her womb.
> Placing those *biqila* (sprouting grains) on the gundo means: 'Sprout. Have children.'
> The mother-in-law will also add some coffee-fruits."
> (Shagerdi Bukko, Waquma Tollera)
> [Coffee-beans are a symbol of the vagina representing the girl to be a potential mother. The beans are still hidden in the shell at this moment, protected and inaccessible as a virgin's vagina.]

The piercing of the coffee-fruits

"The bride now gives the gundo to her groom's mother. She herself now takes his spear and his stool. She carries the stool with her left hand, holding it against her breast. In her right hand she grasps the spear. She brings them to the groom who

is waiting outside. She must carry the spear point upwards. The groom sits down in the stool in front of the house. The girl hands him his spear and presents him the gundo. One by one he takes the coffee-fruits from the gundo and pierces them with his spear. Neither he nor the girl say a word during this ritual."

(Waquma Tollera)[34]

[The spear symbolizes the male organ, the stool the husband's authority.]

The symbolism of the spear is clear in the following song (a girl's song):

O sheath of a spear,
handsome daughter of Bulli,
sister of the *qarre*
let us weep for your sake.

[The *qarre* is the traditional tonsure of maidens. The song is sung by the girl's friends when she is about to leave her parents' house for that of her bridegroom and to lose her virginity.]

The slaughtering of a sheep

After this the bride goes back into the house. She is not allowed to watch the slaughtering of the sheep, because it is her own blood that is going to be shed. "The sheep *is* the girl," as people say.

"The spear should be new as is the gundo. Its shaft should be made of fragrant from a flowering tree, *ulaga* or *abayi.* If the wood is new, so much the better, since it is still moist. But you can also make an older shaft moist again by anointing it with butter. The point, however, should not be anointed or it will not cut well."

[Flowering wood and butter are both symbols of fertility.]

"In former times, we had two spears, one for *rakko* (the wedding ritual) and for sacrifices, and one for fighting. We could not walk about with the first spear. It was always kept in the backroom."

(Ambassa Waqo)

[34] This piercing of the coffee-fruits is no longer done in the Dembidollo area, nor is the spear any longer used to slaughter the sheep.

The 'blood of the girl'

"As soon as the groom has cut the sheep's throat, an trusty old man takes a little of the blood before it touches the earth and puts it on the gundo with the sprouting-grains. Then he quickly takes the gundo into the house." (Shagerdi Bukko)

[As the Matcha understand, a child cannot be conceived without the mother's blood mixing with the man's sperm; and it is the man who causes the woman's blood to flow. Any sexual intercourse, then, is in a way a repetition of the first at which the bride gives her maiden-blood for the sake of motherhood.]

[The old man acts quickly. He covers the gundo with his white shawl (shamma) in order to protect 'the bride's blood' from the evil eye. For the same reason, he must be a trusted man himself, and is always a kinsman of the groom.]

"In the backroom the old man puts the blood of the sheep on the bride's navel and, if she asks, on the inside of her thighs, that she may have a child soon. While doing this, he says: 'Have children. May your blood sprout (into children).' "

(Shagerdi Bukko)

[It is always an old man who is asked to do this. Only men can anoint with blood. Women are forbidden to touch it.]

"And while he is doing this, the mother-in-law says: 'Be a woman who bleeds to give birth. Be a woman who, when she has given birth to children, is given to bring them up (may they not die). May this blood bring you pregnancy and honour.'
After this she touches the bride's belly and her thighs with the coffee-fruits and the sprouting grains, saying: 'May your womb carry children. May your thighs produce sons and daughters.' "

(Shagerdi Bukko, Waquma Tollera)

The preparing of buna qala

"After this she begins immediately to prepare *buna qala.* She puts the coffee-fruits from the gundo in butter together with others and puts them over the fire." (Shagerdi Bukko)

[The *buna qala* ('slaughtered coffee') – ritual eloquently expresses the 'killing' of the woman for the sake of motherhood. It will be described fully in the next chapter.]

A final remark of Waquma Tollera deserves to be quoted here:

"The girl is intact (lit. 'closed'),
the butter is newly prepared (lit. 'hot'),
the gundo is new;
all these things are new.
By these symbols (*fakenya*) they perform the ritual."

The first sexual intercourse

The chief issue in this matter is the idea of a 'killing'. It is emphasized by the fact that the bride is expected to offer resistance. This becomes clear from the following short interview between my assistant Asafa and Shagerdi Bukko:

As.: "Why must the girl resist her groom?"
SB.: "Should she then lie quietly and not resist at all?"
As.: "But why should she put up resistance?"
SB.: "Today she changes into a woman. She has to show that she is a virgin. She is intact."

[There are even stories of brides who emerged victorious from this battle.]

This first coitus is marked by another custom.

"At the first sexual intercourse, a man and a woman should be present to help the boy and the girl to do everything in the right way. If the girl does not behave as she should, the woman will tell her what to do. If the boy does not act as he should, the man must point out it to him. The boy must beat his bride, but on entering her he must not go too far. It is enough that her maiden-blood is shed. If he is unrestrained, it is not good for the girl." (Beqele Lamu)

[On this occasion it is bloodshed rather than orgasm that is sought.]

The small blood-stained cloth

The bride must ensure that her maiden-blood is caught in a small cloth. As soon as the assisting woman sees this blood, she utters a shout of joy *"Ililililili!"* which is continued by the women who are waiting to hear it outside the backroom.

Later, this blood-stained cloth is shown by the bride's *minje* to everyone present; on this occasion he collects money for the bride. This *minje* is a man chosen by the groom to be his wife's advisor and helper in married life, if there is trouble with her husband or with her in-laws. This *minje* later brings the blood-stained cloth to the bride's parents, congratulating them with the words: *"Ofkalte herumte* – she achieved it: she married indeed a virgin."

> "If the girl proves not to be a virgin, the boy can send her back to her parents. He will say then: 'I thought I married a virgin, but she was a woman.' " (Shagerdi Bukko)
>
> [In such a case the whole wedding ritual was false.] [35]

3. Some rituals at the birth of a child

As soon as the child is born, the women who are assisting the mother utter the customary shout of joy *'Ililili'*, four times for a girl and five times for a boy. They anoint her with butter and feed her with morsels of a special porridge, made for this occasion. While doing this they say: *"Tadomi* – give birth again and again." The baby, too, is given butter in his mouth.

After the birth the women of the neighbourhood gather three times in the house of their companion (the third, fifth and ninth day) to sing praise-songs. In these songs Maram is praised first, she who assisted the mother in delivering her child. Other themes are the honour and joy of motherhood and the unhappy fate of a childless woman. As well as this stanzas are heard which have direct bearing on the subject of this chapter, namely verses in which giving birth on the woman's part is associated with killing on the men's part. A few examples:

[35] It is, however, not only a shame for a girl and her parents but also for the boy who has been taken in. This latter is a reason for keeping the matter secret. We can safely say: 1. that the great majority of the girls are still virgin at marriage; 2. that in the opposite case the stability of the marriage is seriously threatened. Matcha marriage is a marriage for life. In case of barrenness the man may take a second wife, but his first wife retains position as the first wife in the household and would adopt one of the second wife's children.

a) Gáfarsá kolbá jajú
People speak with awe of the buffalo's horns,

árbá húmbisá jajú
they speak with awe of the elephant's tusks,

útu dhágaú dhaqá
but hearing even this he (the man who did not kill as yet) sets out.

Yá Balás dhabáaf kennĭ.
O Balas, give a trophy to the one who has none.

[Balas: the guardian spirit and master of wilderness.]

Tchĭninsú afa butú;
She (the woman in labour) clutches at the grass (under her sleeping-skin);

mĭtu dágalé butú;
in pain she clutches at the dagale (horizontal stems in the wall);

útu dhágesú bosĭ
But hearing even this groaning she (the childless woman) cries for a child herself.

Yá Marám, dhabdúf kennĭ.
O Maram, give a child to the one who has none.

b) Ajesán baqá 'njilú,
A killer never stops going to the wilderness,

Désun tchĭninsú 'njilú.
nor a fertile woman to labour.

[There is a saying which echoes the above verse: "*Dhalaf mirga hinqufani* – There is never enough of children and trophies."]

c) Utu Bálasĭn taé,
If I were Balas,

Bálasĭ Bongá taé,
Balas of Bonga (an area in the wilderness),

dhábaadháf mirgá kennén,
I would give a trophy to the man who has not,

dhádha késa isá tchibsé,
I would make him ly in the butter,

ákka gérarú 'lalá.
that I may see him telling about his exploit.

[Killing in itself is not enough: one should also be able to report one's deed well. Accordingly, after killing his buffalo, the killer composes in the wilder-

ness especially that part of his triumph-song which bears on his own specific achievement.]

Utú Máramiń taé,	If I were Maram,
Máram dúbartĭ taé,	Maram of the women,
dhábdudháf ilmá kennén,	I would give a child to the woman who has not,
fĭnchan késa 'shé tchibsé,	I would make her ly in cher child's urine,
ákka 'shén tatú 'lalá.	that I may see how she feels.

[In everyday speech 'finchan' also includes sperm. Here the baby's urine is seen already in connection with his sperm. It is not only seen as perfectly clean but also as a good omen for God's blessing in offspring.]

d) Adamsań gurrá malé,	The value of a hunter is being a brave hunter,
fácho qában dówidháa;	having a trophy is only a prove that he is;
Dáumsĭ gurrá malé	the value of a woman is bravely accepting the pains of labour,
mútcha qábden dówidháa.	having a child is only a prove that she did so.

4. A buffalo-killer comes home

As soon as a man has killed a buffalo, he sends word to his kinsfolk at home. He himself stays in the wilderness, or in the house of a friend to give the others ample time to prepare everything needful for his homecoming-feast. Some distance from his house, he is welcomed by his friends and by the girls and boys with appropriate songs. With his weapon (in former times a spear, nowadays a gun) and his trophies (the horns, tail and heels of the buffalo) he approaches his house slowly, singing his triumph-song in which he is joined by the songs of the youths and the girls. In front of the house his father and mother are waiting for him. He puts his trophies at their feet and embraces them both.

At this time, he usually pays particular honour to his mother. Nowadays, he does this only in song, but in former times, he would bring a special gift for her from the wilderness. It consisted of three giant snail-shells, kept together with a string made from his buffalo's skin. The present, called *'tchatchu'* was worn on the right wrist.

Yá hadháko gúrattĭ	O my mother, your face is dark,
ényutĭ hatĭ garbá?	but to whom is his mother a slave?
Anaf sĭtu wárqedhá.	To me, your son, you are gold.
Anu sĭ fidérattĭ:	I have brought (something) for you:
tchátchu hĭdhachún gesé.	Time has come (for you) to put on a tchatchu.

The full meaning of this is that his mother has not only risked her life in giving him birth, but also that she has accepted the burden of rearing a son who, in his turn, will risk his life by setting out to kill. The Matcha have a saying, indeed: "*Ilmon dhira duaf dhalate* – a son who is a real man is born for death."

> "The killer presents his mother with the tchatchu to honour her. He is saying: 'You gave me birth, and now I have killed; I am honoured and now I wish to honour you.' His mother looks well with that tchatchu on her wrist, and people look up to her and do her honour.
> It is as if you give me a paper on which you have written that I was helping you in your research. You gave that paper to me in the presence of many people. The paper itself is not of much value, but the honour is great." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

In addition, the killer not only praises his mother for the pains of childbirth endured for his sake and for accepting the responsibility of rearing a son who is a real man, but he also thanks her for other things she did for him. Indeed, it was his mother who, again and again, prepared his provisions, when he was about to set out, and who gave him her blessing, saying: "May Waqa give you a buffalo."

a) Nán ajése, yá hadhakó,	I killed, o my mother,
hádha gállaa qámadĭ;	you who gave me wheat as galla

si galéra, gámmadĭ!	now I have come back to you, rejoice!

[*Galla:* provisions such as grains of barley and wheat, usually roasted in butter.]

b) Immamánko, yá Agé,	O my mother Agitu,
átam, átam gállafnáan,	how well, how well did you prepare my galla,
gállaanké galá dhumé;	still it was finished when I started my way back home;
átam, átam ébbifnáan	how you blessed me from your heart;
mútchanké galá turé.	still your son was long in coming back.

A man I knew well had tried to kill a buffalo for many years, and each time another had succeeded in doing so, he was in a bad mood for several days. At last he succeeded. His mother, a lively old woman, looked rejuvenated. She went everywhere to share her joy with other people. She sang and danced in anticipation of her son's festive homecoming. Later, I saw her dancing with her son; the latter with his trophies in his hands and singing his triumph-song. There was no tchatchu on this occasion and I did not notice if, in all the stir and bustle another ritual was performed. This is a short ritual by which the happy mother expresses once more her willingness to have a son who risks his life again and again. This ritual is as follows:

The mother sits down on a mat as if very tired. Another woman takes her little finger, saying:

W. "Rise up."

M. "I feel too weak."

W. "Feel weak to curse (your son) and feel strong to bless (him)."

This is repeated three times. The third time, the mother gets up.

[The ritual is also performed after the birth of a child and some days after wedding, in the latter case in view of the hardships of married life. Here it points to the burden of having a son who again and again risks his life.]

Anointing the killer

Though the killer is usually already anointed with butter on his homecoming, the festive anointing is postponed until the day he

makes peace with the guardian spirit of the buffaloes and with the buffalo's ayana. After he has done this by means of the sacrifice of a sheep, he and his hunting-companions have their heads anointed with butter by his mother and another woman of her generation. Here we should remember that butter is a symbol of female fertility. While the two women are doing this, the killer sings:

Yá 'she dhádha ná dibdé,	O you who anointed me with butter,
lámu bá'aa 'nbátiní	don't carry anymore a heavy load
yó qorrásummá malé;	unless it is qorrasumma (fragrant leaves);
lámu éla 'nádiní	don't groan anymore under a burden
mítu dáumsáa malé.	unless under the pains of childbirth.

After which he spits in their hands, saying: "*Tadomi* – Give birth again and again." (Lit.: Do it again and again.)

To which the women reply: "*Tadomi* – Kill again and again."

[A woman who bears again and again is still called '*tadomtu*' and a man who kills again and again is still called '*tadoma*'. These words are used exclusively for child-bearing and killing.
The two older women act as representatives of all the women. It does not matter if they themselves will not bear anymore. However, we should also remember that people of the same generation cannot bless one another.]

After this anointing, a good friend of the killer – he should be a killer himself – puts three morsels of porridge, a porridge in his mouth, under the joyful 'Ililili' of the women, one time for every morsel.

At this the killer sings:

Askutí lamán kuté;	I took two times askuti (the ritual morsels concerned);
Ililís lamán buté.	I got two times 'Ilili'.

[A reference to the butter and the shouts of 'Ilili' he received at birth.]

Triumph-songs of the killers

The act of killing is seen to be in a way identical with sexual intercourse, especially the first sexual intercourse on wedding-day.

a) A killer who had borrowed his father's gun, acknowledged this gesture on his father's part in this song:

Mál an gódhe qáweké?	What did I do with your gun?
dhĭgaan qáben sĭ galché,	I returned it to you with blood on it,
áka gúddedá durbé.	as (on) the thighs of a girl (on her wedding-day).
Mál an gódhe gállaké?	What did I do with your galla (o my mother)?
tóko dhĭgaanán laqé,	part of it I mixed with blood,
tóko dhĭrafán laadhé.	part of it I shared with heroes (his companions).

b) After a day of communal work, it is the custom to sing praise-songs for the cattle, the grain and the honeywine. These are the ritual songs for this occasion. After this there is free singing. However, the first of these free songs must be the triumph-song of a killer. An old killer began thus:

Dádhi máltu kútaré	Who will stop the song for the honeywine
gérartú kutá malé?	if not a singer of a killer's song?
Gúre, yá talĭlekó	Buffalo, o my beauty,
wájin gála mĭnjekó.	come to my house with my minje.

[It is under the protection of her minje, her protector and advisor in married life, that the bride is brought to her groom's house. The singer says 'my minje', since the minje is chosen by the groom himself. So the buffalo is compared here with a bride who is about to be 'killed' by her groom. This is why in this song he is made female, even if he was in fact a bull.]

c) Killers will say in their triumph-songs that they longed to kill a buffalo as a woman longs for a child, or they will make comparisons like these:

Ulfa kóp'a 'ndhĭsiná;	Don't leave a pregnant woman alone;
gáfa désu 'nbékanĭ.	you do not know when she'll give birth.
Gúrgudú 'ntuffátiná:	Don't despise a gurgudu (a man who has not killed as yet):
gáfa ajésu 'nbékanĭ.	you do not know when he will kill.
Dúbartĭ qay' úlatú	A woman who smokes her belly (to get pregnant)
gáf' ulfóftu békuré?	do people know when she'll get pregnant?
gáf' ulfóftu 'nbékanĭ.	No they do not know.
Gúrb' ajésuf mármarú	A youth who longs to kill
gáf' ajésu békuré?	do people know when he will kill?
gáf' ajésu 'nbékanĭ.	No, they do not know.

[The woman who smokes her belly does so with fragrant leaves. The youth who aches for killing shows his courage and anticipates his exploit in songs which please people (which are 'fragrant' to them).]

5. Privileges connected with killing and child-bearing

"The feasts connected with killing were our greatest feasts. I have seen this myself. The killer was not only anointed in his own house: he was invited in all homes of the country around and further. With a woman who had given birth to a son it was the same: she would not enter a house, unless she was first anointed there." (Mirresa Gamtesa)

[When people use the word '*biya*' which is best translated by 'country', they usually have in mind a more limited area than the English word suggests. To them a 'biya' is a rather limited area, separated from others by little streams or hills. Such a 'biya' rarely contains more than some twenty houses.]

Shortly before I started my research, a law had been issued forbidding the killing of big game like elephants, buffaloes, leopards and lions. This obliged the people to drastically reduce their celebrations in honour of killers and to hold them towards nightfall. At that time, these killers' feasts had become so numerous (there could be even several killers at the same time in a 'biya') that this reduction was, in a way, welcome to the people, because making beer and giving money to the killers had become a real burden to them.

In ancient times, a killer had a right to wear a *gunfura,* a full hairdress. This right was shared by the mother of a son. It was a symbol of the 'fullness' of the person in question.

Killers and their wives enjoyed a right of precedence on many occasions, e.g. whenever a killer's wife went to draw water with other women, she had the right to draw first.

In addition, killers had a right to wear rings in their ears. There was quite a hierarchy in these rings, both in regard to the material and to the ear (left or right) in which they could be worn. It depended on the kind of animals they had killed.

On the other hand, all of these people were expected not to insist too much on their privileges. Until the present day, the singing of personal triumph-songs is frowned upon outside certain ritual celebrations (killers' feasts for example). Even then, they should be sung without display of pride and in a subdued voice, quite in contrast with the words of their content.

A killer's wife who, for instance, in the row of women reached the river or source third, would always be offered by the others to draw water first, but in fact she would be expected not to stick always to this privilege, giving precedence to the two women who reached the water before her.

Trophy-stands

The trophies, generally speaking called '*facha*', were hung in the house. After the killer's death, however, they were removed from the house and hung on a stand, erected near the road-side, as near as possible to the killer's house.

The stand was always made from two stems or big branches of the *dembi*-tree, which take new roots on the spot where they have been planted. The trophies themselves, hung on a cross-bar between the dembi-stems, were often protected against rain by a roof of corrugated iron in order to prevent them from decaying too soon.

Within a few years the trophies wither away, but the dembi-trees keep on growing. These dembi-trees continue to be called 'facha', 'since something of the facha is still in them'.

> "The trophies are removed from the house, because the father has to give way to the son. As long as the father was alive, something of his ayana was also in his trophies; though they were dry, something of the father's ayana was still in them. Now the father has died. He is buried and his trophies, too, are removed from the house and hung on the stand. The killer's ayana is not in them anymore but, in a way, they still are linked to him, testifying that he was a hero. It is the killer's eldest son who has to erect his father's trophy-stand." (Gammachu Magarsa)

I found several of these trophy-stands in my area of research. One of them carried several buffalo-trophies and, in addition, at the far right a fake-penis, made of a maize-ear wrapped in a reddish piece of cloth, an indication that the deceased one had once killed a man. Its place to the far right was a clear indication that this human trophy was considered as the most important one.

In those days there were still people who used to bow to such a trophy-stand while passing by it.

6. Men and women

When older people are in a talkative mood, they still sometimes tell 'stories of their fathers and mothers', stories about women told by men, and stories about men told by women, in which one sex derides the other. We find the same in old sayings and songs.

One of the things women have always despised most in men is cowardice. In spite of the fact that during the last decades new values have sprung up, words such as 'You are like me (you are a woman, you did not kill)' are still a common challenge in quarrels between women and men, girls and boys.

In killers' triumph-songs and in songs of would-be killers the singer often mentions as a motive for his setting out the mockery of women and girls. Such mockery is hinted at in the following song:

Tĭyitú tuqát kassá	When the finger touches the trigger the bullet shoots out for sure;

dhĭra túțuqát kassá.	When you touches a man in his honour, he will be set our for sure.

[The Oromo verses are so intricated that one cannot translate them in two lines.]

Mothers may still encourage their sons to set out for killing with a song like this:

Hántutá matá dhabé,	O little child with uncut hair,
án sután gallá kaé.	I took all time to prepare your galla (provisions).
Wóllegá jelá taĭ.	Stay at the foot fo Wollega's hills.
Yá Garbáa garáa dadhi	O Garbaa with a belly full of honeywine
ársasĭ garáa kaĭ.	Put a bullet in his (the buffalo's) belly.

[Hantuta: a little rat. Mothers call their babies sometimes 'my little rat'. Garbaa is her son's name. The song comes from eastern Matchaland from where the men used to set out for Wollega province (western Matchaland) in order to kill buffaloes.]

Girl's songs

It is especially the girls who are prolific in songs which praise the heroes and scoff at cowards.

a) The following song was recorded from a group of girls who sang it while they were weeding. They were weeding in a row, and the two soloists were standing in the centre, relieving one another.

Soloist: Góta sĭnará warqé,	Warriors with golden cartridge-belts,
tĭyitĭ sif fĭduré?	Shall I bring bullets for you?
Késa sĭ funánuré?	Shall I pick out the best ones for you?

CHOIR: GOTA SINARA WARQE — WARRIORS WITH GOLDEN CARTRIDGE-BELTS,
TIYITI SIF FIDURE? — SHALL I BRING BULLETS FOR YOU?
KESA SI FUNANURE? — SHALL I PICK OUT THE BEST ONES FOR YOU?

[Normally one of the soloists starts the song by singing the choir.]

Soloist: Fársotán bishán naqá, — I add water to the beer,
útu gútu 'ndánfiní. — before it ferments and starts rising.
Bákar ílma Nágaó, — Bakara, son of Nagao,
tákan máqaké farsá, — let me praise you for a while,
útu dúte 'nbádiní. — before death takes you away.

[Just as the water causes the beer to rise, may my song encourage you to perform great deeds.
Besides this there is also another symbolism in this song: being a girl I am only water, you are the beer.]

Soloist: Yóna wálun mófaé, — When our skin-dress grows old,
jírbi fóne úffanná. — we dress ourselves in cotton.
Yéwu jágni gódanú, — When the brave ones set out,
lúgna fúlattí tufná. — we spit the cowards in their face.

CHOIR: GOTA ...

Soloist: Ań babálin háma, — I am cutting the babali,
bábalí 'fan yábba. — the rushes up there on the hill.
Ań dargágon wáma, — I praise our slender youths,
dárgagá abba fárda. — our slender youths on horseback.

[People still make raincoats of these rushes: they protect, as the youths protect the girls of their lineage.
The thin rushes are a symbol of the slender boys.
The girl says: she cuts the rushes on the hill, i.e. she selects them: those on the hill are the youths who are 'above the others', and as such seen by everyone. While cutting them she presses them against her breast.]

CHOIR: GOTA ...

Soloist: Nán nyaaddhá, nan nyáa-dha, — I eat, I eat them certainly,
gáraachĭ na 'ndhúddhu: — intestines don't block my throat:
gáraachĭ fon mĭti. — nevertheless they are not meat.
Nán farsá, nan fársa, — I praise, I praise them certainly,
járra fárse 'nqúfu; — but I am not satisfied while doing this;
ánaaf qómo mĭti. — they are not of my lineage (the warriors in question).

[She compares them with intestines, while the youths of her own lineage are meat to her.
The song is a challenge to the youths of her own lineage.]

CHOIR: GOTA ...

Soloist: Why do you force a warrior's door
pushing it against the *dagale*?

[*Dagale:* horizontal stems, used to reinforce the walls of a house and keeping the vertical stems together.
The dagale are a symbol of the house's (the family's) cohesiveness. The intruder does violence to this cohesiveness.]

Why do you call a real man's wife
in a low voice, you coward?
May a deadly sickness call you
away from your father's house (may it kill you)
in these days so hard for others.

[This is in fact part of a warriors' song. May a deadly sickness bring you the same fate that our courage may bring to us.]

CHOIR: WARRIORS ...

Soloist: I am looking for a friend;
he is tall and slender.

I take care not to anger him.
O, my hands are trembling (for him, while I am weeding);
he is such a brave warrior!
He presses on into the *kusaye*
and drives the cowards out from it.

[The fragrant *kusaye* plants are a symbol of the girls themselves.]

CHOIR: WARRIORS ...

Soloist: What is the good of making beer,
if you don't add any water?
What is the good of setting out,
if you don't achieve great deeds?
When a buffalo-tail is hung up,
your father's ears feel good (hearing your praise).

CHOIR: WARRIORS ...

Soloist:	Gúrban fúla daánisá,	O boy with the good looking face,
	qóratĭrra qátisá,	tracking about in the thorns,
	yá Waq kénnif mĭrgasá.	O Waqa give him his trophy.
	Sĭf haláatu mĭrgaké,	May he give you your trophy,
	dábalé wallĭt ansé.	and still more (trophies) one after another.

CHOIR: GOTA ...

Soloist:	An wadésa 'nyábu,	I do not climb a wadesa tree,
	óbbolésa bóye;	that brother of the wild pig (as ugly as a wild pig);
	jĭgu bĭyot nyáata.	when it falls, it is eaten by the soil.
	Málif bór hindú'u?	Why does it not die tomorrow?
	An dabésa 'njálu,	I do not like a coward,
	óbbolésakóle;	even if he were my brother;
	dhĭrarrá baqáata.	he flees away from real men.
	Málif qĭlle 'nbú'u?	Why does he not disappear in the grave?

CHOIR: GOTA ...

Soloist:	Mé 'lal sógidáko, ĭsa búnarr' háfe.	Look, look at my salt, my salt that survived the coffee.
	Mé 'lal gótichákо, ĭsa dúarr' háfe.	Look, look at my lord, my lord who survived death.

[Note the perfect rhyme from the beginning unto the end of verses 1 and 3, 2 and 4. Nowadays, the introductory verses could well be understood of the modern coffee which is drunk with salt. However, we have to do here with a very ancient song, which in fact points to the buna qala, the coffee-fruits stewed in butter, to which salt is added for a good taste. Here the salt disappears entirely, it only survives in its taste. In the same way a hero who is killed survives in another way as an inestimable treasure in his lineage's memory or better (as the Oromo see it) in his lineage's ayana.]

CHOIR: GOTA SINARA WAROE.	WARRIORS WITH GOLDEN CARTRIDGE-BELTS,
TIYITI SIF FIDURE?	SHALL I BRING BULLETS FOR YOU?
KESA SI FUDANURE?	MAY I PICK OUT THE BEST ONES FOR YOU?

b) The next song is sung on the occasion of a killer's making peace with the particular ayana of the buffalo he killed and with the guardian spirit (*tchato*) of his buffalo's clan as a whole. Prospective killers walk around a little *lafto* tree, planted not far from his house. An undercut of the sheep that has been slaughtered is hung on a branch of that tree. The one who succeeds in pulling down this little piece of meat with his spear is obliged to set out to kill. The fine taste of this undercut is a symbol of the coveted buffalo-trophies.

CHOIR: ISHO Y'OBBOLOTA EN FON LUQE FUDHA? — ISHO, BROTHERS, WHO WILL PULL DOWN THE UNDERCUT?

[*Isho:* shout of encouragement.]

Soloist: Mĭla dúr gufún nyaaté, hár'a tchámatú nyaatá. — Before tree-stumps ate the feet, now shoes eat them.

Máta qárabaán nyaaté, hár'a dhádhatĭ baatá. — Before the little knife ate the hair, now it is covered with butter.

[In the wilderness tree-stumps hurt the hunter's feet; now he wears shoes that he received as a present.
Until now he had his head shaved with a *'qaraba'*, a little knife; now it is anointed with butter and he enjoys the privilege of letting his hair grow freely. Nowadays, such hairstyles are not seen any longer, but they still figure in ancient songs like this.]

CHOIR: ISHO ...

Soloist: Yá Gudér, ya Gúderĭ, Gúder góddetĭ lafá. — O Guder, o Guder, Guder is an ugly land.

Yá durbé, ya dúbarĭ, dúbartúmmatú fafá. — O girlhood, o womanhood, being a woman means being less.

CHOIR: ISHO ...

Soloist: Ana dháanu, háadhoké, ána rásu ĭddoké. — O may your hardships hit me, your sister, may they hurt me instead of you.

Bákon kóp'a búlte, gálte bása túlte. — In the wilderness you were lonely, but at your homecoming you get butter.

[Back home you are surrounded by well-wishers. "May it eat me" i.e. "May your misfortune hit me instead of you", is a common expression of sympathy in everyday life.]

CHOIR: ISHO ...

Soloist: Yá dhagá 'ndakĭni, — O big grinding-stone, don't grind,
májin sĭf hadáku. — let the small one grind for you.
Yá dhabá 'ndafĭni, — O you who did not kill as yet, don't lose hope,
Máram sĭf haláatu. — may Maram give you your trophy.

[The first two lines express the same idea as the first lines of the previous stanza. Significantly, Maram who gives children to the women also is invoked here to help the men who set out to kill. However, Maram's help can only be asked by women and girls. Men do not pray to Maram.]

CHOIR: ISHO ...

Soloist: Wáyu ĭlmo Dúbe, — O Wayu, son of Dube,
Báyu ĭlmo Wálde, — Bayu, son of Walde,
Béqu ĭlm' Awano, — Bequ, son of Awano,
ĭlmolé gotóta! — offspring of heroes!

[Wayu, Dube, Bayu, and Bequ are shortened names. Wayu stands for Waqjira, Dube for Dubaala, Bayu for Bayenne, Bequ for Beqele. The shortened version expresses tenderness, love, sympathy.]

CHOIR: ISHO ...

Soloist: Asu 'lmá Disása, — Asu (Asafa), son of Disasa,
Sáthenyĭ 'lma Lámu, — Sathenyi, son of Lamu,
ó Disó 'lma Lámu, — o Diso (Disasa), son of Lamu,
yá gotá dulóme. — o aged heroes.

[Here rather the fathers than the sons are praised. Heroes beget heroes.]

CHOIR: ISHO ...

Soloist: Yéwu bókan róbe, — When it was raining (the way you told us),

áddun ésa gése?	where did the sun go?
Yéwu 'sá 'kas góte,	When you achieved this,
lúbbuké 'tam góte?	where did you put your life?

CHOIR: ISHO ...

Soloist: Yéwu 'sá 'kas góte,	When you achieved this,
lúbbuké 'tam góte?	how did you risk your life?
Gérarĭ, na sĭrbi,	Sing your triumph-song and dance for me,
wáesá nat hĭmi.	tell me all about it.

CHOIR: ISHO ...

Soloist: An wadésa 'nyábu,	I do not climb a wadesa tree,
óbbolésa móye.	that brother of the mortar.
An dabésa 'njálu,	I do not like a coward,
óbbolésakóle.	even if he were my brother.
Góni bóra dámaksá,	Heroes cause the buffalo to rise,
lúgni móqa sálaksá.	cowards lick moqa.

[A mortar is made of *wadesa*-wood. At the same time it is also a symbol of sexual intercourse, a thing girls do not want before marriage.
While the hunter causes the buffalo to get up, the coward goes to the latter's wife who gets up to prepare porridge for him. The name used here for this despicable porridge is *'moqa'* which in fact is only dough mixed with much water, often given to children when they are fretful.
The buffalo is the hero's trophy, the moqa is the coward's trophy.]

CHOIR: ISHO ...

Soloist: Góta kán' iláli,	Look at this hero,
na dúba dhábaaté,	standing behind me (while I am singing),
"Bul', durbéko," jédha.	"Live long, you girl," he says.
Lúgna kán' iláli,	Look at this coward,
na dúba dhábaaté,	standing behind me,

	"Dúi, durbéko," jédha.	"Die, you girl," he says. [He is angry with me, because I praise the heroes and scoff at the cowards.]
CHOIR:	ISHO ...	
Soloist:	Ila 'sá ajése,	Look at the killer,
	fáchodhá mirgĭsa;	a buffalo-tail is his trophy;
	ájesét dibáta.	he killed and is anointed.
	Inni dhábe gále	He who came home without trophy
	gúddadhá gadĭsa;	is very, very sad;
	bóet sĭt jimáta.	he weeps while he tells you of his failure.
	Yá Waqá kennĭfi;	O Waqa give him (what he longs for);
	kénnifká gafársa.	give him a buffalo.
CHOIR:	ISHO, Y'OBBOLOTA, EN FON LUQE FUDHA?	ISHO, BROTHERS, WHO WILL PULL DOWN THE UNDERCUT?

A young killer's comment

"Our whole society obliges us to set out. They want their men to be killers and if they have killed a lion or a buffalo, everyone must know it. But it is especially the women and girls who put pressure on us. When I myself set out I sought honour but, at the same time, I had feelings of hatred against the people who forced me to risk my life and to face the hardships of the wilderness. Still I felt the women and girls were right. They consider a man who has not killed to be less courageous as they are. They themselves risk their lives again and again in order to give children to their husband's lineage. It is natural to them: all women do it; they shed their blood again and again. A man does not need courage in order to have sexual intercourse with them. If the woman fights back and resists, it is to challenge the man's strength, but the man does not risk his life in shedding the woman's blood. Therefore, in order to be equal in courage with women, the man must set out to kill big game.

Women have also another reason for wanting their husbands to be killers. If a man kills a buffalo or a lion, he is himself as a

buffalo or a lion, even stronger than a lion or a buffalo. Such a man will give her a son who is a buffalo or a lion. She desires such a son. You must remember that her link with her husband's lineage is not her husband but her son. She wants to give to his lineage real men. It is her honour and it is also her protection. Such sons will protect their mother." (Gammachu Magarsa)

6. Sources of life

Matcha society has several rules of behaviour which enshrine the woman's dignity as a source of life.

a) Matcha women are forbidden to kill; they should not even witness a killing.

b) Female animals which are not evidently barren or past bearing should not be killed, either for domestic use or for rituals.

c) This is even more the case if a girl or a woman is killed, and here fertility does not play a part at all. Far from being an honourable act, to kill a woman would be spoken of with horror.

7. Dark sides

Although bloodshed on the part of men and shedding their own blood on the part of women is apprehended as a natural law for the good of procreation, we also find notions and customs which clearly show that the Matcha do not experience it as something good in every respect.

a) We saw already what it meant to have 'blood on one's hands' following manslaughter.

But even with regard to the killing of animals, a feeling persists (in spite of evident contrary practices) that their life is under Waqa's dominion – a feeling that Waqa has given to the Oromo only their cattle, sheep and goats (later on, also hens were included) as animals they can kill for their food, and that they should keep their hands off all other animals.

They do not have any peacemaking ritual for a bull's or a sheep's *ayana* after they have slaughtered them, despite the fact that bulls are such strong animals and their *ayana* could harm them badly. With other strong animals that do not belong to the world of man, such as lions, elephants, leopards, and buffaloes it is different. After killing them, an elaborate peacemaking ritual has to be performed to appease

their *ayana.* These *ayana* cannot be looked upon as entirely detached from Waqa.

I noted several remarks of older men having an element of excuse for their killing of a buffalo or a lion – remarks which more or less said that the animal's *ayana* had given the creature to them because of its misbehaviour in its own clan.

b) Sexual intercourse, too, has its dark sides as has the blood shed by it. On one hand it comes from Waqa and is blessed by him with children and with great pleasure; on the other hand it affects people with *gadidu.*

The word *'gadidu'* (its first meaning is 'human shadow') in this context means something impure in a person that also can affect his surroundings. It renders him unable to play a role of importance in any ritual whatsoever. The pilgrims to the *Abba Muda,* the great ritual leader in their country of origin, had to abstain from sexual intercourse from the first to the last day of their pilgrimage. Until recently, a number of people believed that a person with *gadidu* should not walk among flowering coffee-plants, lest the blossoms die. And even at the present day a person having had sexual intercourse the night before is still forbidden to enter a house where a child has been circumcised: the wound would not heal.

A person with *gadidu* cannot enter the house of a pagan ritual expert such as the *qallu.* Many Christians will still not receive holy communion in these circumstances; others will not even go to church; still others do go, but not unless they have washed their body.

> "It is a mystery. All people like sexual intercourse very much, and, at the same time, they feel that there is something wrong with it. But nobody can say what it is. Perhaps it is because it takes away reason from man." (Gammachu Magarsa)

In former times, men would not accept food from their wives while the latter were menstruating.

> "It lasts five days. During these days, we do not eat any food our wife has prepared. It comes back every month. We call it *'darara dubarti'* – the blossoming of the women."
>
> (Shagerdi Bukko)

> "When a woman has *adafi* (when she is in her monthly period) she sits down near the fire and puts *ebbicha* and *ulmaya* leaves

on it (fragrant and purifying leaves) and keeps her body in the smoke. She never enters the *gola* (part of the backroom where food and drink are stored and where the young calves are kept). She sits in her house for five days. Her husband does not eat from her hands; he eats with the neighbours. After this, she washes her body, and after she has done this, she may enter the *gola* again." (An old woman)

Nowadays, these customs are on the wane in most families. But even in former times, a girl's menstrual blood was not regarded as impure. As Waquma Tollera phrased it: "A girl's bleeding is Waqa's work in her."

As people see it, the menstrual blood of the women, however, is an effect of sexual intercourse, of a 'piercing' on the part of the man, of a killing.

Chapter 24

THE BUNA QALA RITUAL

The word *'buna'* means 'coffee'. The word *'qala'* is best translated by 'slaughtered' since the verb *'qalu'* means 'killing by cutting the throat'. The very fact that this verb is used is an indication that the coffee does not stand for itself here, but that it is a symbol of a being of flesh and blood. It is a symbol, indeed, of the woman. The verb 'to slaugther' points at a killing at which blood is shed; in this case it refers to sexual intercourse, at which, in Matcha view, the woman's blood is shed.

Despite this, the ritual is not performed by the man who is the 'killer' but by the woman herself, and only by married women, never by girls. It gives expression to the idea that the woman freely accepts being 'killed' in this way – for the sake of motherhood.

The cherry-like coffeefruits are bitten open and stewed in melted butter. The butter enters the fruits and reaches the beans inside. These beans which, because of their shape, account for the coffeefruits' use as a symbol of the woman: their shape is reminder of the female organ much as cowrie-shells are.

The butter is by its very nature a symbol of the cow's, i.e. of female fertility. In this ritual it is made extra tasty by the coffee and the coffee is made extra tasty by the butter. The result is a new and even more eloquent and effective symbol of sexual intercourse. In addition, when the fruits in the end burst open they are a symbol of the hoped for result of sexual intercourse: childbirth.

But not only human fertility is referred to in this ritual: the fertility of cattle and sheep and the bursting open of seeds in the earth is included. All these things are expressed and prayed for in a seemingly inexhaustible variety of symbols and prayers. But only the most important ones will be given here.

Sharing the tasty *buna qala* with others is obligatory; one cannot eat it alone. In fact, the word 'to eat' is entirely displaced here according to the people's view. People never speak of 'eating *buna qala'* but always of 'chewing' it. *"Buna qala* is not made for the throat," as they phrase it, "it helps us to pray." – to pray for offspring in children, cattle and sheep, and for an abundant harvest.

1. Preparing the buna qala

a. The coffeefruits are bitten open

An old woman speaks:

> "We have first to bite open all the coffeefruits, before putting them in the butter. The first three of them should be bitten open with a prayer. For these three fruits we choose the best ones.
> While biting open the first fruit we say: 'O Waqa, cut all evil things from us.'
>
> [I.e. in the same way as I myself am cutting of the top of this coffeefruit.]
>
> At the second fruit we pray: 'O Waqa, cut all fatal disease off from us.'
> At the third fruit we say: 'O Waqa, cut all evil words off from us.'
>
> [The meaning is that Waqa may free her from all these things for the sake of fertility in children as is also emphasized in the next words.]
>
> Finally we say: 'This *buna qala* means fullness. O Waqa, make us live day and night in the midst of plenty of offspring (offspring of man, domestic animals and grain).

But these prayers express only part of the symbolism. Gammachu Magarsa supplies the rest:

> "We compare this biting open of the coffeefruits with the first sexual intercourse on the wedding-day, when the man has to force the girl to open her thighs in order to get access to her vagina. By cutting open the coffeefruit herself, the woman expresses her willingness to be 'pierced' for the sake of motherhood at any sexual intercourse."

b. Melting and stirring the butter

Before opening the coffeefruits with her teeth, the woman has put the butter on the fire – butter mixed with spices. The clay-pot which is used for this is called *'wachiti'* and is exclusively used for the preparation of *buna qala.*

It is first carefully cleaned with *ebbicha* leaves. In the people's eyes, this tree with its bitter leaves, its sweet smelling flowers and its tasty honey is an image of Waqa's purity and of his benevolence. "Waqa likes the *ebbicha* tree," people say, and also: "The *ayana* of the coffee and the *ayana* of the butter like the *ebbicha.*"

As soon as the butter has melted, the woman pours it out through a little hole, made in the clay-pot near the brim, that all dirt may stay behind in the *wachiti.* After this she cleans the *wachiti* again and pours the purified butter back in it. Next she puts the coffeefruits in the butter and begins to stir the mixture with a short stick. All this is done while the clay-pot is still standing beside the hearth-stones. In the meantime, she says some prayers; for example:

> "O Waqa, all the things I produce, make them grow well for me, and, after having done so, keep them from death (children, calves, crops).
> May Waqa send down good things to us (i.e. rain, and not hail and storms).
> May the earth cause good things to grow for us (good crops for people and good grass for the cattle).

c. The symbolism of the wachiti and the stick

The *wachiti* is felt to be an image of the lineage as a descent group. By the very fact that it is made of many rolls of clay and every roll in its turn is made of several handfuls of clay, it is a symbol of the lineage's cohesion. As it is demonstrated in this song:

Wáchitĭ dinqárra	The wachiti in the backroom
bĭyo qóbo bĭcho;	is soil and pinches of clay
wájinĭn middhánna,	a fine sight we are together,
yaá qomóko, ishó!	o my lineage, good!
	[It is sung by men and youths of the same lineage on setting out together.]

> "While handling the *wachiti*, the woman really sees it this way. She knows that she bears children for the sake of her husband's lineage, for its growth, strength and cohesion."
>
> (Gammachu Magarsa)

The same Gammachu, however, gives also another symbolism of the *wachiti.* After saying the last words, he immediately added:

"But the *wachiti* is also the female organ in which the stick, the male organ, is 'stirring'. So it is that we call this stick also *'mundo'* or *'dannaba'* which are words for the male organ."

Indeed, in a few traditional lineages like his, this is still done. By stirring the butter and the coffeefruits with their many beans (seen as so many vaginas), the woman creates a symbol of sexual intercourse — not only of the act in itself but also of the sensual pleasure it brings. The 'sweetness' of the butter, made extra tasty by the coffee, is a symbol of the 'sweetness' of the orgasm.

"In order to avoid that the *mundo* is only a dry stick which cannot give life, our women, sometimes, made it from a bundle of strong fragrant grass-stems, tied securely together."

(Gammachu Magarsa)

d. Putting the pot on the fire

"After the woman has put all the coffeefruits in the butter, she takes the *wachiti* and moves it towards the fire. But she withdraws it immediately, saying:
'O my coffee, look, I withdraw you from the fire:
in the same way withdraw all evil from me.'
Only after this does she put the *wachiti* on the hearth-stones, saying:
'O my coffee, I made you reach the fire:
in the same way, make peace come to me.'
And as soon as the *wachiti* is standing firmly on the hearth-stones (to remain there for some time), she adds:
'O my coffee, at the moment you burst open, grant us lasting peace.'

[Peace with Waqa, with the *ayana*, with her people, and all the benefits deriving from it.]

She does not pray to the coffee itself, she prays to Waqa. So it is that, while moving the *wachiti* towards the fire, she also prays at times:
'O Waqa, I am coming towards you; come to me to keep away all evil.
O Waqa, I have come to you (the *wachiti* stands on the fire) may your blessing stay with me.' "

(Shagerdi Bukko)

e. While stirring the butter with the coffeefruits

While she is stirring the butter and the coffeefruits – the process may well take half an hour and more – the woman says over and over a little prayer. There are many of such prayers, a few examples may suffice.

"O Waqa, you made us spend the night in peace;
make us spend also this day in peace.
Make sprout what we have sown;
and having made it sprout, make it ripen.
Make our little ones grown up (children, calves, lambs, chicks);
make the grown-ups go on living.
May the children bury their parents (that is: may they not die before their parents).
Keep our oxen alive under the yoke;
keep our cows alive above the milk-jar.
Give us good things from heaven (good rain);
give us good things from the earth.
Heal the sick;
comfort those who are sad;
support the aged."

She may also address the coffee in her *wachiti*, praying for people, animals, and crops.

But if her preparing *buna qala* is only the first stage of a greater ritual that is to follow, she always will also add prayers referring to this specific ritual.

On the occasion of a thanksgiving-ritual after the birth of a calf, I heard an old woman praying:

"O Waqa, keep mother and child together (cow and calf).
Keep the mother alive above her child;
keep the child alive beneath its mother.
May mother and child get on well together.
[Prevent the cow from pushing off her calf.]
May this calf be a lasting gift for us,
a true gift from you.
[I.e. a gift you do not begrudge us by later causing the calf to die.]

Keep us from hanging the milk-jar (because the cow has died).
Keep us from lack of buttermilk.
Keep us from pulling down our cattle-fence (for lack of cattle)."

On her son's wedding-day, his mother will pray:

"O my coffee, give my son's wife plenty of offspring (children, cattle, sheep)
may she bear children,
give her long life,
give her good health
give her lasting peace.
O Waqa, may she understand and enjoy my words;
may she understand and enjoy my son's words.
Give them children together."

f. The coffeefruits burst open

The woman is still stirring her *buna qala* and suddenly the first coffeefruit bursts open. The people say: "It says *'Tass'*." Immediately the woman replies:

"Ashama, my coffee, burst open to bring peace.
There you opened your mouth:
please wish me peace.
Keep far from me all evil tongues."

[*'Ashama'* is a customary greeting, especially addressed to someone carrying a burden.]

The coffee 'has opened its mouth', it has spoken. But it has done so in a special way, as people see it. The verb they use here is not the usual word for speaking *'dubbachu'* but the word *'dhaddhachu'*, a verb used to indicate an outburst into speech or sounds. Thus it is used

1. for a killer as he breaks into a triumph-song.

"Here it has the same meaning: the exploding of the coffeefruit is felt as a shout of triumph on the woman's part at the birth of a child. She, too, has swollen like the coffeefruit."

"A killer bursts into a triumph-song after he has risked his life and sustained the hardships of the wilderness.

A woman bursts into a shout of triumph after she has risked her life and sustained the hardships of pregnancy and labour; and these things are also symbolized by the stirring."

(Gammachu Magarsa)

2. But it has also a second meaning: it also refers to the last awakening to lucid speech of a dying person.

"When a dying father, after a long time of increasing weakness suddenly comes to life again and starts speaking normally, we say of him *'hindhaddhata* – he bursts out'. Young people will say then: 'He speaks – *hindubbata;* he'll get well again.' But older people know better. They say: 'No, this is the last time he speaks clearly – *hindhaddhata.* Now he will die soon."

(Waquma Tollera)

It is in his last lucid moments that a dying father may express his last will and give his last blessing – an especially powerful and significant blessing which his children are eager to receive.

The exploding of the coffeefruits then is seen not only as a shout of triumph, but also as a parallel to such last words on the part of a dying father or mother.

The reaction of the woman to this explosion, "O my coffee bursts open to give peace, wish me peace", has to be understood also in this light.

g. A summarizing interview – Waquma Tollera and his son Ensermu

WT.: "My son, every coffeefruit says only one time 'Tass'. A dying person, too, will never 'explode' into speech twice. So it is the same with the coffee and a dying person. Yet there is also a difference. When a person speaks for the last time and dies, it makes people weep. When the coffee says 'Tass' and dies, it makes people happy; they begin to pray and thank Waqa."

Ens.: "But, my father, is the dying of the coffee then something good for people?"

WT.: "Of course it is, my son. Don't people rejoice at it? Don't they start praising Waqa? Don't they say when it bursts open: 'Speak words of peace to us, and make us, too, speak words of peace to one another?' And don't they say: 'O Waqa, praise be to you?'

Our people have done this from the very beginning. From the very beginning, they have slaughtered the coffee in order to pray. *Buna qala* is the oldest thing of all. It was with our people from the very beginning. It is the *buna qala* which keeps mother and child together.

[I.e. which prevents our women from being without children.]

Therefore, the *buna qala* always comes first (in all rituals).
Whether we sacrifice a bull or an old cow,
whether we slaughter near our house or on a hill-top,
the *buna qala* is always slaughtered first.
Since they invoke Waqa's name with it, our people regard it
as higher and more important than their cattle.
Coffee is a plant of blessing,
it is a gift from Waqa for our good;
from the very beginning Waqa has blessed it for us.
Where there is *buna qala*, there is prayer.
Buna qala is prayer. It brings man nearer to Waqa.
People do not slaughter the coffee for their throat
(for the sake of eating it) but in order to greet Waqa with it.
When we bite the coffee open, we invoke Waqa;
when we kill it, we invoke Waqa.
We do not pray to the *buna qala* itself: the *buna qala* only helps us to pray."

[I.e. when people address the coffee they address its *ayana*, and this *ayana* is 'something of Waqa'.
Waquma Tollera is here deliberately defending – not for the first time in my contact with him – the religious views and customs of his non-Christian ancestors.]

Gammachu Magarsa commented on these words of Waquma Tollera:

"What Waqa gives has always something of Waqa in it. In the *buna qala* Waqa comes near to us, giving us children, calves and crops.
To me *buna qala* is like the cross (he has in mind the Ethiopian cross without an image of Christ on it). When I see it in the hand of a priest, I say: "Bless me, Father", and I kiss that cross.

In doing so I worship Christ. In the same way we worship Waqa in the *buna qala.*"

h. A note about the woman who prepares the buna qala

"When the *buna qala* is not prepared with a specific ritual in mind, the mother of the family can prepare it, even if she is young. She needs not to abstain from sexual intercourse the night before.
But when there is a ritual such as thanksgiving for the birth of a calf, the celebration of the birth of a child or a sacrifice for the deceased father's *ayana*, we prefer the woman preparing it to be past childbearing. Even if such a woman has had sexual intercourse the night before – and she will often avoid it – it is somehow less significant, since there is no longer shedding of blood involved." (Gammachu Magarsa)

2. The blessing of the house

Let us now follow the woman and her ritual further. The *buna qala* has spoken; the *buna qala* has blessed her. Now she is going to pass on the *buna qala*'s blessing to her house.

The ritual is more or less a repetition of the one performed on the day the house was built. On that day buna-beans are put under the hearth-stones and into the holes for the supporting poles (*utuba*) and for the two main poles in the backwall. All these poles must be of a wood that is of the house and its 'good smell'. This 'good smell' again symbolizes peace in the family and good relations with the neighbours.

a. The hearth-stones

First she takes four coffeebeans and pushes them, two by two, under the little hearth-stones, saying:

"O my hearth-stones, be to us hearth-stones of peace."

In contrast to these smaller hearth-stones, the third one which is always bigger, cannot be moved. It stands fast in the ground as a symbol of permanence. So she puts a further two coffeebeans against it, saying:

"O my fire-place, be to us a lasting fire-place."

b. The supporting pole

Now she puts two beans at the foot of the supporting-pole, or, if there are more than one, at the foot of one of them, saying:

"O my *utuba,* keep this house standing for us.
Plant here children, cattle and sheep."

[I.e. in the same way you were planted here. The word 'house' also includes, and even more strongly, the members of the house, the family.]

c. The threshold

Next she turns to the threshold – a beam of strong, fragrant wood – between the front- and backroom and puts four beans on it, two to right side and two to the left. While doing so she prays:

"O Waqa, make this threshold a threshold of childbirth for us;

[Children are born in the backroom.]

make it a threshold we cross to spend the night in peace.
O my threshold, carry us;
keep away all evil from us."

d. The two main stems in the backwall

The backwall is called *'borro'*, but the word is also used for the backroom as a whole.

She puts two coffeebeans under each stem, saying:

"O my *borro,* be a *borro* that is firm and up-standing
a *borro* that does not fall down;
a *borro* where children are born;
where people sleep and keep in good health;
a *borro* where sons marry
and where daughters are given in marriage.
O Waqa, keep all evil people and everything evil away
from this *borro;*
make it for us a *borro* of peace.

[The *borro* is the place of the marriage negotiations and of the first sexual intercourse of sons and their brides.]

3. Sharing the buna qala with others

To share the *buna qala* with one's neighbours is essential. It emphasizes that the family is in peace with them, an essential requirement for them to receive the blessing of the *buna qala.* It also symbolizes the family's friendly feelings in regard to their neighbours, their wish that they, too, may be blessed by Waqa.

> "We know the *buna qala* from of old. While I was still young, I used to make it every day. It is not so long since I started making coffee with water. Our fathers and mothers did not know this. When we pray, while preparing our *buna qala*, we do not pray for ourselves only, but also for our neighbours.
> When we chew our *buna qala,* we never do so alone; it ought to be chewed along with other people. So, I used to call my neighbours as soon as I began to prepare it. 'Come and chew my coffee,' I said. If nobody was around, while my *buna qala* was still hot, I began immediately to make a new lot, but only a few this time, and called my neighbours again. Then I mixed the second *buna qala* with the first." (An old woman)

The *buna qala*, indeed, has to be shared while it is still hot, a symbol of the woman's eagerness to offer it and the guests' eagerness to receive it – an eagerness which also expresses respect for the *buna qala* itself. In addition, it is more tasty, while it is still hot.

This respect for the *buna qala* and the people's belief in the potency of its blessing is also expressed in the way they receive it. At this moment they call this blessing *'kuma'* which means 'thousand' and also 'plenty'.

> "The *buna qala* should be given to everyone in the house. Such is the law. When they take the little cup with *buna qala* (always with both hands) they say to the people of the house: '*Kuma horra* – produce thousand (thousand heads of cattle); *kuma bobasa* – lead out thousand (heads of cattle) to graze.' This must be said.
> It is very wrong to refuse such a cup of *buna qala*; one who does so does not wish to see the others happy. The one who offered him the cup will be very angry and will curse him."
> (Waquma Tollera)

"Every time you give *buna qala* to people, they bless you. 'Produce a thousand; lead out a thousand' they say. 'May Waqa give you good things from above; may the earth give you good things from below. Produce. Grow rich. Stay alive in the midst of what you have produced.'
Thus they say as they accept the *buna qala* and on returning the cup." (Shagerdi Bukko)

The *buna qala* is eaten with primitive spoons, cut out from dry sorghum stems.

Out of reasons of economy it is often mixed with grains of barley roasted in butter, which does not mean, however, people ever eat it in quantity. Coffee is often scarce and there may be many guests. One thing our informants did not mention, because they take it for granted is that they use to give and accept things with both hands, bowing slightly at the same time. Giving and accepting with both hands is a symbol of one's willingness to give and to accept.

Something should always be left on the plate or in the cup to express that one was given more than enough. In the case of the *buna qala* such customs use to be more accentuated.

4. The 'peace of the qilla'

In former times, people took care to keep some *buna qala* in their houses as a symbol of lasting peace, fertility and prosperity. It was kept in a little container, made of *wadesa* wood.

"*Wadesa* wood does not burst (when it comes into contact with the hot butter). The *wadesa* tree is a good tree. Its flowers have a fine scent." (Asafa Disasa)

This *qilla* was kept in the backroom to the right side, the place where all ritual objects are kept. The *buna qala* in it was called *'naga qilla'* — the peace of the *qilla.*

Such a *qilla* was given to the bride on her wedding-day by her mother. But nowadays, we find such *qilla* only in a few houses.

Besides having the *naga qilla* always in their houses, people, in former times, would also use it for other purposes. Suffice it to mention two of them.

1. When the father was about to say some prayers as did, for instance, an *ayantu* (an astronomer and expert about the various *ayana* of the days) when he was sitting on his stool outside to pass part of the night watching the stars, his wife would bring him the *naga qilla* and with a little spoon would give him some of it in his mouth. It helped him to pray.

2. "According to my grandmother a mother would, from time to time, take her own *naga qilla* to the market-place, where she could meet a married daughter. If she met her there, she would give her this *naga qilla.* It was a ritual gesture loaded with meaning, since the present did not only express *'naga* -- peace' in its broadest sense of well-being and blessing from above in general, but also in a special way fertility.
In her turn the daughter would present her mother on occasion with her own *naga qilla.*
After explaining this to me, she added that it was Makko Billi who proclaimed the law that no husband could prevent his wife from going to the market in order to meet her married daughters, her in-laws, and her own kinsfolk there."
(Gammachu Magarsa)

Remark

The old custom of preparing *buna qala* for its own sake, without any link with a ritual has been replaced everywhere, nowadays, by cooking the coffee in water and drinking it with salt. The change was probably fostered by a general decrease in cattle husbandry. A fair number of poorer people, nowadays, do not even have one single cow.

But it is still prepared as an indispensable part of certain rituals such as thanksgiving for the birth of a calf, engagement (the final negotiations on engagement-day are not started before the *buna qala* has 'spoken'), marriage (the blessing of the bride and the groom in the bride's house, the blessing of the bride after the sheep has been slaughtered, and her blessing after her time of seclusion has elapsed). Also it is used at several minor rituals of which we will speak later on. At the two first rituals its use is still always combined with the so-called *'dhaaba* – the things put apart'.

5. The dhaaba or the 'things put apart'

a. The qualities of the dhaaba

The three essential *dhaaba* are the *qilla* with *buna qala* and two jars of beer, one bigger than the other. At certain rituals a calabash with

milk and a jar of honeywine are added, but the first only at the ritual of thanksgiving after the birth of a calf and at the blessing of the bride, and the second only at the blessing of bride and bride-groom.

Not every beer is suitable. It should be beer of the Matcha's ancient grains, daguja and barley, the grains of their ancestors, which were given to them from the beginning of time.

Nowadays most beer is made from maize. But maize is a comparative newcomer among cereals. Hence maize-beer is not suitable for rituals. So will *gesho* leaves – leaves mostly added nowadays for the sake of fermentation, but which were unknown to their ancestors.

This ritual beer, called *'borde'* has a much lighter colour than maize-beer and is also thicker.

The sprouting grains, used for beer are a symbol of the children who 'sprout' in their mother's womb. This makes the beer in general a symbol of female fertility.

Apart from this, all *dhaaba* should meet three requirements:

1. They should be 'young' as people say, i.e. newly made, fresh. They should have a long life ahead of them and be pure, as all young living beings are pure. So the beer should be first-day beer.

2. They should be untasted by man, i.e. pure as they come from the hands of Waqa. The woman has to taste, of course, whether her *borde* is good or not, but, after doing so, she will add some *jikita* (the initial beer with only a little water) that the *borde* may be new again.

3. Coffee and grains should be a produce by the family itself. As we will see, a strong link exists between the people and their *dhaaba.*

b. The containers are filled

Since 'the *buna qala* is first of all things', the *qilla* is first filled from the *wachiti.*

After this the mother fills the beer-jars. To understand this ritual we must know that the bigger jar is called *'hadha* – mother' and the smaller one *'ilmo* – child'.

First the 'mother' is filled with *borde.* While doing this the woman says: "*Ila hadha* – this is the mother."

Next she fills the 'child' from the 'mother', saying: "*Ila ilmo* – this is the child."

> "The child has always to be filled from the mother, never the other way round, since, from the very beginning, Waqa created them thus." (Shagerdi Bukko)

After this, the woman fills the mother-jar once more to the brim.

> "Both mother and child should be filled to the brim. This signifies fullness and plenty. Therefore, the mother prays while doing so: 'O Waqa, I filled the *dhaaba* to the brim; do you fill our lives to the full.' (in years, offspring, wealth)."
>
> (Shagerdi Bukko)

c. The containers are put aside

The place for this is on the right side of the backroom near the wall. First 'mother' and 'child' are put near one another, the mother on a ritually higher place than the child, i.e. nearer the backwall or, as people say, 'higher'. They must touch one another. While putting them thus, the woman says:

> "O Waqa, keep me together with my children.
> Keep mother and child together.
> Keep the children alive under their mothers."
>
> ['Under their mothers (or parents)' expresses a position of dependency. Matcha say: "My child died from under me" and "My father died from above me".]

Next the *qilla* with *buna qala* is put against 'mother' and 'child', in a way that it touches both of them. While doing so the woman prays:

> "O Waqa, I have put the *buna qala* under 'mother' and 'child'; keep it thus, I pray you."
>
> [A prayer for lasting fertility in children.]

People see further symbolic meanings in the position of the *dhaaba.* Thus Shagerdi Bukko:

> "The *dhaaba* should touch one another: people, too, do not pray separately from each other.
> They should also touch one another, because people should be one.
> Therefore we pray:
> 'O Waqa, give me the support of people,
> give me the support of (fertile) cattle.' "

d. The dhaaba should not remain uncovered

At least during the ritual proper.

"They do not cover the things they put apart for Waqa.
They are there to say thanks to Waqa." (Shagerdi Bukko)

"They should remain uncovered. Not in fact to call Waqa down on them, but that our prayers be heard by Waqa. They open for us the way to Waqa.
They are not our gift to Waqa; but they help us to pray."
(Waquma Tollera)

e. Blessing above the dhaaba

The blessings are always spoken as people say 'above the *dhaaba'*. To this effect, the *dhaaba* are moved a little way from the wall and put in a row in front of the backwall but at some distance from it. Chairs are put between the backwall and the *dhaaba* for the father and mother.

It is noteworthy that in this new arrangement the small *qilla* with *buna qala* must stand 'above' the 'mother' and 'child'. It must stand 'higher' since the *buna qala* is higher than mother and child. The gift of human fertility, indeed, takes precedence over childbirth itself.

An example of such a blessing 'above the *dhaaba'* is the one given by the parents the day their daughter is to leave the house with her groom. The parents are sitting 'above' the *dhaaba*, the young couple is sitting 'beneath' the *dhaaba,* facing the girl's parents. They are surrounded by some elders of the girl's family and of the neighbourhood.

These elders answer the prayers of the parents. Most of the speaking is done by the bride's father, but her mother may add some blessings of her own. Here now follows such a blessing. (P. = parents; E. = elders and other people)

P.: "Sprout, blossom."
E.: "SPROUT, BLOSSOM."
P.: "Produce, grow rich."
E.: "PRODUCE, GROW RICH."
P.: "May the mare in your *gola* blossom (grow pregnant)
[*Gola:* part of the house.]

E.: "MAY IT BLOSSOM."
P.: "May the cow within your fence blossom."
E.: "MAY IT BLOSSOM."
P.: "Have offspring."
E.: "HAVE OFFSPRING."
P.: "O Waqa make them fertile for us."
E.: "MAKE THEM FERTILE."
P.: "Grant them good health."
E.: "GRANT THEM GOOD HEALTH."
P.: "Grant them lasting prosperity."
E.: "GRANT THEM THIS."
P.: "Grant them lasting peace."
E.: "GRANT THEM PEACE."

After which the elders pronounce a series of blessings of their own. The parents, the bride and the groom, and the elders, all of them drink from the *dhaaba* after the blessing has been spoken (or, sometimes, even while it is being spoken).

Other rituals may follow. For example, I once witnessed a ritual of thanksgiving after the birth of a calf, where a similar blessing-above-the-*dhaaba* is given. Here, the mother-cow is anointed with *buna qala* and is given some of it in her mouth that she may calve again.

6. Some other buna qala rituals

We are not speaking here anymore now of rituals at which *dhaaba* are put apart. The following are specifically women's rituals.

a. Childbirth

"They also make *buna qala* when a woman is about to give birth to a child. When the first fruits burst open they pray:
'Ashama, my coffee, burst open to wish us a good delivery.
Make us happy." (Waquma Tollera)

"After the birth of a child, we make *buna qala* again, and when it bursts open we say: *'Ashama,* my coffee. You made us happy. O Waqa, you helped us, you gave our daughter a good delivery. Praise be to you.'
When we bury the afterbirth (the day after childbirth) we first put some coffeefruits (not *buna qala*) in the hole that the mother may give birth again." (Asafa Disasa's mother)

b. When the child is brought outside for the first time

The mother sits on a mat in front of her house. An older woman, usually her mother-in-law, takes her little finger and says: "Rise up." She answers: "I am tired." To which the older woman replies: "Be weak to curse and be strong to bless." This happens three times. After which the young mother rises up.

It is a symbolic expression of the mother's acceptance of her child with all the troubles child-rearing brings with it.

After this little ritual, the mother is given some *buna qala* and some is thrown around to impart its blessing to the whole compound.

7. Contrasting accents

While speaking of 'flexibility and variety in ritual' we pointed at shifts of emphasis in the same ritual as found with western and eastern Matcha. We indicated that e.g. in western Matchaland the bride is forbidden to see the blood of the sheep, slaughtered on her wedding-day, since it 'is' her own blood. In eastern Matchaland she must stand near her groom while he slaughters, as a symbol of her willingness to shed her maiden-blood for the sake of motherhood. While the sheep is slaughtered, she is standing at his left; as soon as it has been slaughtered she moves over to his right, the ritual place of the house-wife.

With *buna qala* we see something similar. Here, the contrasting Oromo tribes are the Matcha and the Arsi. With the Matcha the preparation of *buna qala* is a exclusively woman's business and only married women can do it, since it is a symbol of sexual intercourse whereby the woman suffers herself to be 'killed' for the sake of motherhood.

With the Arsi Oromo it is the man who prepares *buna qala,* even though Arsi men like the Matcha men never prepare their food themselves on hearth-stones. Why this exception for the *buna qala?* Because the Arsi stress the fact that it is the man who 'kills' the woman. A common view of things can give rise to quite contrasting rituals.

8. A myth

The Matcha have few myths about the origin of things, and these are fast sinking into oblivion.

Since myths are stories and stories travel fast and far, it is not surprising to find echoes of these Matcha myths both in the Middle East and in other parts of Africa, in a way that makes it impossible to be sure where they originated.

Matcha myths, however, always exhibit something of their own specific way of life and thought. In their myths we reach the roots of their identity as a people.

The narrator of the following myth is Shagerdi Bukko.

a. How Waqa gave the coffee-plant to man

"Once upon a day, long ago, at the time when Waqa was still walking on the earth, he called a man and said to him: 'Come: I am going to tell you the day you will die.'

The man, however, replied: 'I will never die. Why should I die? I want to stay alive for ever like you.'

'How is it possible for you,' Waqa said, 'to stay alive and not to die? Come, and hear from me the day of your death. I will cause you to die after you have seen your grandchildren until the fifth generation. You will live for three hundred years. However, after you have seen five generations of grandchildren, you will have to die. As you see, I'll postpone your death for a long time.' The man replied: 'No, I do not want to die at all. I am your son. I wish to stay alive together with you.'

In this way he opposed Waqa and refused to listen to him.

Now Waqa said: 'Since you refuse to accept my decision, disappear from my eyes. You will die today.'

At that the man mounted his horse and galloped away. He went as fast as he could. He went from where the sun rises towards where it sets. (This direction is already a symbol of death.)

In the evening, towards sunset, he reached a place where some people had dug a grave and were sitting near it. When they saw the horseman coming, they said to one another: 'Look, there he is.'

The man halted his horse. He asked them: 'For whom did you dig this grave?' – 'We do not know,' they said, 'but we think it is you. This morning Waqa came here and told us: 'Dig a grave for someone – for a man who refused to accept my decision. He is bound to pass this way and, as soon as he is here, he will die."So we have done what Waqa told us to do.'

'O Waqa!' the man exclaimed. 'So it is true what people say: Even if you leave early in the morning, you cannot escape Waqa.'

[A saying. Literally it runs: "You cannot escape from under Waqa (sky/God)."]

He dismounted and died on the spot, and they buried him.

After five days, Waqa remembered that man again. He went to the spot where those people were living. They told him: 'O Waqa, all things have happened as you told us. The man passed this way and he has died on the spot. We have buried him as you told us to do.'
'Bring me to the grave,' Waqa said.
So they did.
'Now open the grave again,' Waqa said.
When Waqa saw that man lying in his grave, tears burst from his eyes. They fell on the corpse of that man. And behold: at the very moment a coffee-plant sprouted from the spot where the tears had fallen.

So it is that the coffee precedes all other things. So it is that it is first prepared in all rituals. The coffee is our great medicine.
From among all trees it was blessed by Waqa, blessed by his tears.
All plants grow from rain, but the coffee-plant sprouted from the tears of Waqa."

Comment

a. The story must be regarded along with other stories about the beginning of time when Waqa still walked on the earth and 'people could ask him whatever they wanted.' This idea of a paradisical time goes with the belief that, in the beginning, the sky (Waqa) was laying on the earth, fertilizing it by rain. At that time everything was good. But as a result of man's rebellion against Waqa, the latter withdrew from the earth, at least in part. He went upwards. His withdrawal resulted in a diminishment of life on earth in all its forms – in earlier death, in diseases, in drought a.s.o. All these misfortunes are represented in the myth as being against Waqa's will. Hence his tears.

"Waqa does not like death", as people say. "Is he not the source of all life?"

b. It is clear that we have here two stories. The first is rather a moralistic one and is known throughout the Middle East. The second is purely mythical and has to do with origins.

As Shagerdi Bukko told them they were part of a set of three stories, the last being a myth about the creation of the bees out of the worms already covering the corpse.

Shagerdi Bukko likes to tell stories in sets, mostly of three. The stories of such a set had always something in common, if only a minor detail. "It was the way my father told me them," he would say. It shows the way such stories were passed on from generation to generation; the sets help people to remember them.

The link between these stories is that all three of them deal with life and death, death and procreation. (The bees are seen as a symbol of fertility and of procreation without sexual intercourse.) In the mythical part of this story the Matcha's view comes to the fore that Waqa gave man children as a compensation for the fact that he must die. He lives on in his offspring.

> "When somebody has died, we still ask: 'Does he have a son?' If people say: 'No, he has not,' we answer: 'Then he is truly dead.' If people say: 'Yes, he has,' we anser: 'Then he has not died.' "
>
> (Asafa Disasa)

c. The story is not generally known among the people of my area. None of my other informants or my assistants knew it. It impressed them deeply. Each time Shagerdi Bukko told it, they were moved to tears.

Only once, one of my older informants, Ambassa Waqa, who was not of Shagerdi's clan, took up the idea, when he said:

> "The coffee-plants sprouted from the grave of the son of Waqa (probably: the first man). Therefore it is the oldest of all things (in time and dignity). It sprouted from a place of blessing. All Oromo say so."

Significantly, though he said he did not know the story, he started telling another one with a similar motif, taken from the Ethiopian Christian folklore:

> "Once I was told a story. Yesus' mother was on the way to Egypt with her child. Soldiers came after her to kill her son; soldiers of a bad king. At that she pressed her child against her womb in order to protect him. While she was standing this way, her tears fell on the ground, and on that spot the lemon-tree sprouted. Therefore the lemon is a medicine for twelve diseases."

Chapter 25

OBO AND TCHORA

One day my young assistant Mirresa Gamtesa entered my room radiant. He told me that an old man, Sabbo, who had been a hunting companion of his father had come to pay him a visit. Mirresa had invited him because the man had been a leader of hunting-expeditions for years. As such he would certainly be well acquainted with hunting rituals, my special interest at that time.

"Have you already spoken with him about hunting customs?" I asked. "Yes ... At least I tried to do. But Sabbo seemed to be a little uneasy. You know, killing always has something to do with sex, and therefore he asked me if I was an *obo* or a *tchora.* I did not know. I felt ashamed. I looked for my mother to ask her, but she was not there."

Mirresa had a similar experience with Shagerdi Bukko whose acquaintance he had made some weeks before. His interview with the old man concerned marriage-customs. Before going into the matter, Shagerdi Bukko asked him: "First, my son, tell me: are you an *obo* or a *tchora?*" Mirresa had still not asked his mother, and once more he was at a loss. Fortunately for him, Shagerdi Bukko did not press the point and gave him some information about marriage-rites. When, later on, it turned out that Mirresa was a *tchora,* while Shagerdi Bukko himself was an *obo,* the old man said sadly: "I have been mistaken. I have done wrong. You and I cannot speak with one another about such things."

Two things emerged to me from these experiences. First, the existence of two distinct groups of people who were not allowed to speak with one another on matters of sex. Second, the young generation's ignorance about their own affiliation.

From that time onwards, I began to pay more attention to this dual system of *obo* and *tchora* and its implications in the people's daily life and in their rituals. I also looked for some information about the matter in the books of Oromo experts, but in vain. So, to my best knowledge, this whole chapter deals with a subject about which, until now, nothing has been published.

1. The heart of the matter

When he did not use ritual language, Shagerdi Bukko formulated 'the *obo* and *tchora* law' as follows:

> "If the father is an *obo*, his son is a *tchora*, and his grandson an *obo* again. A man's daughters become *obo*, if they marry an *obo;* and they become *tchora*, if they marry a *tchora*.
> *Obo* and *tchora* are father and son to one another. They must keep their distance from one another in everything concerned with married life. They are not even allowed to speak together of such 'secret things'.
> An *obo* has priority over a *tchora*, since he is the older one. *Obo* and *tchora* were given to us by Waqa from the very beginning. They were given to us for the sake of marriage."

When he spoke in ritual language, as it was used in old times at the proclamation of the law (but sometimes also at home to pass on this law to the children) Shagerdi expressed himself this way:

"Abbaan ooboo hatau	Let the father be an *obo*;
ilmi tchora hatau.	let the son be a *tchora.*
Ooboon tchora hadhaalchu	let the *obo* beget a *tchora*;
Tchoraan ooboo hadhaalchu	let the *tchora* beget an *obo.*
Saffu wolli hafufadhu;	Let them display *saffu* towards one another;
wollitti hindarbina.	they must not change place with one another.
	[*Saffu:* respect, keeping distance]
Yo kun jirachu bate,	If this does not happen,
abbaan ilma hinbeku,	a father will not know his son,
ilmi abbaa hinbeku.	a son will not know his father.
	['Knowing' here means 'behaving like a father should in regard to his son'.]
Ooboo tchoraan abbako hajedhu;	Let a *tchora* call an *obo* his father;
tchora ooboon ilmako hajedhu.	let an *obo* call a *tchora* his son.
Ooboon lamatamo aka-kayu yo arge,	When an *obo* has a grandson,
Obbolesako hajedhu.	let him call him 'my brother'.

Tchoraan lamatamo aka-kayu yo arge,	When a *tchora* has a grandson,
obbolesako hajedhu.	let him call him 'my brother'.
Ooboon tchoraf abba hatau	Let the *obo* be a father to the *tchora;*
tchraan ooboof abba hatau.	let the *tchora* be a father to the *obo.*
Wol dhaa;	Let them go on begetting one another;
wolli saffu bufata.	let them abide by the *saffu* law in regard to one another."

The *obo-tchora* dual system then draws a rigorous dividing line between adjacent generations in matters of sex and procreation. This is, indeed, the meaning of 'Let them display *saffu* towards one another.' A father can never have sexual intercourse with his son's wife, not even after his son's death. A son can never have sexual intercourse with his father's wife, not even after his father's death. Nor can father and son ever have sexual intercourse with the same woman outside marriage.

2. Some consequences in everyday life

a. Girls

People say that with regard to the *obo-tchora* law girls 'are nothing', and that they only enter the dual system by marriage. Still the *obo-tchora* law affects them in a way, even before marriage. In a very traditional lineage such as the Dhae (the one of Gammachu Magarsa) a feeling still persists that an *obo's* daughter is 'in small part a *tchora'.*

> "She shares in part the *tchora's ayana.* Accordingly, she does well to marry a *tchora,* since all *tchora* share the same group-*ayana.*" (Gammachu Magarsa)

In certain rituals involving young girls the fact of their being daughters of an *obo* or a *tchora* plays a part. (See below in this chapter.)

Whether these things point to days long past when girls, too, were fully *obo* and *tchora* – days when *tchora* girls only married *tchora* boys and *obo* girls *obo* boys, remains, at the present state of our knowledge, purely a matter of speculation.

b. Women

"If a woman has become a *tchora* by marriage, loses her husband, she will become the wife of one of her *warsa* (one of her husband's brothers or cousins) who are all also *tchora*. If exceptionally she marries another man of her husband's lineage, this man, too, must be a *tchora*. But if she returns to her parents' home, she is no longer *tchora*, she is as a girl, and can marry either an *obo* or a *tchora*." (Dinsa Sarba)

c. Society at large

All married men and women then and all youths are either *obo* or *tchora*, which means that they can have only sexual relations with half of the people of the other sex, 'since *obo* and *tchora* are father and son'. To do otherwise is to commit classificatory incest.

This holds good for Matcha society as a whole.

d. Classificatory incest against the obo-tchora law

"If an *obo* lies with a *tchora*, they transgress a boundary – the boundary between father and son.
It is *harama* (incest), but it is not as seriously wrong as sleeping with one's own blood." (Shagerdi Bukko)

Nevertheless, people sometimes react strongly against the most serious transgression against the *obo-tchora* law, the one between a man and his son's wife. This happened during my stay in the area, in the town of Dembidollo. The man concerned had been left alone for life by his wife, his son and the daughter-in-law concerned. When we spoke of it with Shagerdi Bukko, his reaction was:

"Yes, he should be thrown out. No one can speak with him now. He committed incest (*'haramofte'* – the female gender of the verb which is used in this case as a token of contempt). Let him be as a dog to us. He acted against Waqa's law, since *obo* and *tchora* are *saffu* towards one another."

e. Talking about 'secret things'

We have already said that young Mirresa Gamtesa did not know whether he was an *obo* or a *tchora*. Most younger people are like him

in this. But the older people are different. They grew up in a time when the *obo-tchora* law obliged them to know of everyone whether he or she was an *obo* or a *tchora.* As Mirresa told me: "My father knew about everyone whether he was an *obo* or a *tchora.*" As Shager-di Bukko phrased it:

> "When I meet somebody on the road unknown to me, I first ask him: 'Are you an *obo* or a *tchora?*' If he is an *obo* as I am myself, I say: 'You are my brother.' In this case we can talk with one another about everything. If, however, he is a *tchora,* we must abide by the *saffu* law while speaking with one another and cannot speak then of 'secret things'.
> If the person is a woman, we ask one another the same. If she is a *tchora,* I say: *'Nui jilba wolli miti* – our knees are not made for one another.'
>
> [Lit.: 'We are no knees for one another.'
> The word 'knees' here stands for 'thighs'.]
>
> If she is older than me, I say: 'Let us not indulge in *'hasa balage* – dirty talk.' If she is younger than me, I say: 'We are mother and son. Let us not indulge in dirty talk.' "

f. Parents and children

> "Parents and children cannot speak with one another about sex. If a mother wants her daughter to be advised about her conduct with boys or about things concerning menstruation, she will ask the girl's grandmother to do so, or she may ask any other woman who is an *obo*, if her daughter is an *obo,* too. The same holds good for father and son." (Asafa Disasa)

Indeed, while gathering information for me, my assistants, sometimes, told me that they had been unable to speak about certain matters with their parents.

> "Children must not see their parents having sexual intercourse. As long as they are still sleeping on a sleeping-skin, people still follow the old custom that the father lays to the mother's right, and behind him, further to the right, his young sons, while the girls are sleeping to the left of their mother. Older boys, nowadays, generally sleep in another part of the house. In former times, they slept in a hut near the cattle fence to guard the cattle or outside the house under the roof."

"The greatest secret in any Matcha family is sexual intercourse between the parents. Even as I am speaking to you now, my tongue grows burdened." (Gammachu Magarsa)

[A western reader should keep in mind here that sex life in general and sexual relations between people in their neighbourhood hold no secrets for Matcha children. "As children we always peeped through the backwall at a first sexual intercourse. We were amused to see the girl fighting back. Nobody chased us away." (Gammachu Magarsa)]

f. Grandparents and grandchildren

"I can speak to my grandson about everything, even about things he cannot speak of with his father. I can give him good advice with regard to his behaviour towards women and girls. I can tell him: 'Don't go that way. Don't do such things.' He is an *obo* and so am I. Therefore, I can do this." (Shagerdi Bukko)

"*Obo* and *obo* can play with one another (he has in mind what one could call 'erotic playing') even if their age diverges widely. They can joke with one another. Especially is this so for a grandmother and her grandson. There is less respect, less distance. They are like friends. A grandmother can say to her grandson: 'O my husband' or 'One day I will marry you.'

My own grandmother is very, very old. She is more than hundred years old. She liked me very much when I was a child. She said to me: 'You are my husband.' She never suffered me to cry. She did not want me to sit on the ground; she would take me on her lap and fondle me. So it is that we have a saying: 'You are a boy who was reared by his grandmother,' a spoilt boy. But she does not like my little son as much as she liked me. She does not like him to touch her knees. 'If a little boy does such a thing to his great-grandmother, she will die soon,' people say. She is a *tchora* and my son is an *obo*.

We also have the same name for both grandparents and grandchildren. I call my grandmother *'ako'* and thus she calls me. I call my grandfather *'akakayu'* or *'akaka'* and thus he calls me."

(Mirresa Gamtesa)

"It is not good when a grandmother lays with her grandson, even though both are *obo* or *tchora*. It's only a manner of speech that they call one another husband and wife. In fact, they never have sexual intercourse with one another." (Shagerdi Bukko)

["It is certainly against the law; however, people would not be too surprised if it did happen. I have never heard of such a thing happening in our country of Dembidollo." (Gammachu Magarsa)]

3. The dual system of obo and tchora in a wider context

An old man confided to me:

"I would like to be more friendly with my son. I would like to show him, how much I love him. But I cannot be to him what I can be to my grandson."

Indeed, the active opposition between adjacent generations is in marked evidence in Oromo social life. Many people could make theirs the words of an Oromo priest: "I have been educated much more by my grandfather than by my father."

This does not mean that there are not fathers who often tell stories to their children at night around the fire and instruct them in the old Oromo way about how to behave themselves and of what they have to know of the people of their neighbourhood and about great personalities of their clan or lineage. Mirresa's father did so and so did Gammachu's. Generally, however, it is the grandparents who are the channels of oral tradition.

"People have a feeling that it should be this way; that oral tradition should go from *obo* to *obo* and from *tchora* to *tchora*. Obo and obo feel themselves to be one. Tchora and tchora feel themselves to be one. They have the same ayana, so they should resemble one another, and they should develop this resemblance still more. Parents and children are bound to be different, since they are obo and tchora, and they should maintain this difference. My own grandfather who was a tchora once told me a secret of the tchora and forbade me to speak of it with my father. It was the secret of the *hiddi*-fruits that were a symbol of our people. I still do not understand why this was a secret of the tchora, but, anyhow, this was what he told me.

All obo living at present feel at one with all the obo who preceded them right back to the beginning of our people. It's through the ayana of all obo that they feel at one with their ancestors, as do the tchora through their own ayana.
I know all my ancestors unto the ninth generation, but in my heart I only count the tchora among them.
Our five gada-groups, too, that took office one after another, were like obo and tchora. The one that had finished its ruling-period never acted as advisor to the group succeeding them but always to the second-next group." (Gammachu Magarsa)

His last words were confirmed unanimously by all my other informants.

Children often pass part of their youth in their grandparents' house, both for the sake of company and in order to help them, especially when their grandparents' children all left home. It is quite common for a grandson or granddaughter to take care of an aging grandfather or grandmother until their death.

Even if they do not live together, a grandfather may pay the school-fee of his grandson and give him some clothes, if he is able to. The boy's own father is often slow to do this: he leaves it to his young son to earn the money needed by rendering all kinds of small services to others. A grown-up boy often prefers to sleep in his grandparents' house, not only because of the reasons mentioned but also because their own house is too small and does not allow him to keep sufficient distance between himself and his parents.

"In former times, a grandfather could give his house and some land to his eldest son's son, thus bypassing the father.
'Aradako daali – inherit the land around my house,' he would say, *'Gemmoko fudhaddhu* – have my hearth-stones.' "

(An old man)

["It still happens. My grandfather did this for my eldest brother." (Gammachu Magarsa)]

At the time the *gada* system was still alive, one of the forms of well-wishing and blessing was: "May Waqa make cause you to see the *butta* of your grandson." Indeed, when a man slaughtered his *butta* bull in the course of his *gada* group's ruling period, his father could not witness this (a symbol of his son's reaching the height of social adulthood and thus replacing him) but the grandfather had to be there.

4. Tchora and obo in the genealogical tree

Gammachu Magarsa spoke of this when he said that, being a tchora himself, he only counted in his heart his tchora ancestors. In this way he reached back to the beginning of his people. We find, indeed, the names Obo and Tchora at the very beginning of the Matcha's genealogical tree. We also understand now why they should figure there: the dual system was very much alive and of the greatest importance. 'Obo' and 'tchora' are in fact proper names, the names of the first obo and the first tchora, respectively the son and the grandson of Matcha. (See this genealogical tree, chapter 10)

The names remained in use as proper names for a long time.

> "There are also lineages called Obo or Tchora after their first ancestor, but such a lineage has within it as have all lineages both obo and tchora." (Bulcha Kurra)

That obo and tchora were there 'from the very beginning' points to the people's belief that the dual system in question existed before the Oromo accepted the *gada* system. In this system the active opposition between adjacent generations was accounted for in many laws and rituals.

Precedence

From the foregoing it becomes clear why in social intercourse an obo enjoys precedence over a tchora. He is the older one. The first obo was the father of the first tchora.

As Shagerdi Bukko put it:

> "A tchora must not pass by an obo,
> unless the latter says: 'Pass by.'
> Even if the obo is still a child, he must say: 'Pass by. May Waqa turn it (this transgression of the law of precedence) into something good for us.' "

5. Remarks

a. Generally speaking, the women adhere to this obo-tchora law more than the men, both in everyday life and in their rituals. One of the reasons for this is certainly that they are very afraid of the consequences of obo-tchora incest: barreness or mis-shapen children.

b. The obo-tchora dual system is also to be found with the Tulama and Arsi Oromo, but under different names.

6. Obo and tchora in various rituals

a. Purification after incest

While dealing with the lineage we spoke of the purification after real incest, i.e. the one against one's own blood. We have seen that the man and woman in question had to be sprinkled with *horra*-water, that they had to be immersed in the *horra* (mineral spring) and that a bull had to be slaughtered in front of the woman's house, after which both man and woman were sprinkled with his blood. Such an incest is seen as a shedding of one's own blood and, consequently, the blood shed had to be washed off with other blood. With incest between people who are not of the same blood but who are obo and tchora, the blood does not play a part. Hence at a purification ritual after such a classificatory incest no bull is slaughtered, though all the other parts of the ritual are the same.

They are also the same in that the *gula* man who has to 'wash' the man has to be an obo, if the sinner is a tchora, and a tchora if the sinner is an obo. The same holds good for the *gula's* sister who has to 'wash' the guilty woman. When before the purification the elders of the man's lineage beat him they will say:

> "Why being a father did you go the way of the son;
> why being a son did you go the way of the father."
>
> [An instance how obo and tchora can be called both of them alternatively 'father' and 'son' in regard to one another.]

b. Levirate

When a man died, his widow married one of her deceased husband's brothers or cousins. But she could not do so before the customary period of mourning had elapsed (one year). During this period, no obo man could enter her house, if she was an obo, and no tchora man, if she was a tchora: she was forbidden to have sexual intercourse.

In the meantime she was entrusted to a man of her husband's lineage. He had to look after her needs and act as go-between her and the lineage. Since this man was forbidden to have sexual intercourse with

her, he had to be a tchora if the woman was an obo and the other way round.

In the ceremony by which he accepted to act as her helper and protector (his name was *'kennata* – the one who is given) the elders would lay her hand in his, saying:

> "Take your mother.
> Every morning and evening ask her what she needs. Whatever trouble she is in, may her (husband's) lineage attend to it.
> She calls him 'my son' and he calls her 'my mother'. Even if she is young, she calls him 'my son'. Even if she is young, he calls her 'my mother'. (Shagerdi Bukko)

After the mourning-period she would marry one of her *warsa* (her husband's brothers or cousins) who naturally would be an obo or a tchora as she was.

> "How could she marry an obo, if she is herself a tchora? Her children would stay what they are, tchora. How can their mother's husband be a tchora since they are also tchora? As for herself, being a tchora she would be a mother to her husband. They would be *saffu* to one another. How then could they be husband and wife?" (Shagerdi Bukko)

c. Birth-customs

Asafa's mother describes her role as an obo at the birth of her grandchild.

> "When the afterbirth was out, we put it on a little stool and poured some water over it. After a short time, we took it off the stool, put it in a piece of broken pottery and added some water again to keep it wet.
> The next morning, I called another woman in order to bury the afterbirth. Being myself an obo I called a tchora woman from among our neighbours. Before starting the work we took one another's hands. This means: we will do it together.
> My companion began to prepare *buna qala*. I myself made a hole in the backroom at a spot where people do not walk. Then one of us had to go out and collect *tchokorsa* grass (a symbol of fertility). If an obo woman has dug the hole, the tchora will go

out to collect *tchokorsa.* She collects a great deal of it. In this way we do everything together.
The woman who has collected the *tchokorsa,* divides it into two parts. She throws one part of it into the hole. Next, I myself, being an obo, took the afterbirth and turned it over into the hole on top of the *tchokorsa.*
My companion threw the rest of her *tchokorsa* on top of the afterbirth.
Then it was my turn to throw four coffeefruits on top of the *tchokorsa,* after which my companion added four sprouting grains of maize (a symbol of children).
Next we helped one another to pick up cowdung, one cake of it. We picked it up carefully with some twigs that it not might be damaged, put it on an old *gundo* (grassplate) and turned it over into the pit.
Then we shouted five times *'ilili'* (a shout of joy in honour of the mother who had given birth to a son) and filled up the hole with earth again."

[A veritable wealth of many fertility symbols. The important feature here, however, is the cooperation between obo and tchora women.]

During the days following the delivery, the women of the neighbourhood come together several times in the house of their companion to sing and to eat a special porridge, 'the porridge of birthgiving', which is not eaten by men, not even by the smallest boy.

On these occasions obo and tchora women insult one another in a playful dance.

Tchora
In the house of our tchora-companion
we intended to spend the night.
To the house of the obo
we intended to set fire.

The house of my tchora-companion
what a fine building it is near the road!
The house of an obo
what a decrepit hut at the roadside!

Obo
O well-fed obo,
o thin tchora.
Why don't you give me precedence at the ford?

I sing of obo and tchora,
and make the tchora a laughing-stock.
Why don't you give me precedence at the ford?
[To be the first to draw water]

Tchora
When an obo gives birth,
only a crumb of salt do we get,
only one little cup of coffee.
Her husband is tied up in rags;
he weeps at what he has to give.

When a tchora gives birth,
we get a bag full of coffee
and a full sack of salt.
Her husband brings a sheep.
He laughs as he does so.

Obo
Tchora with long fingernails
with which you dig out my *hanchote* (potato-like tubers)
your back is ashes (weak)
but your son is honey.
[Her son is an obo.]

d. Homage to a killer

We have seen now how the successful buffalo-killer is anointed with butter by his mother and another woman of her generation.

While speaking of this anointing, a killer pointed out:

> "Since my mother is an obo, she asked a tchora woman to anoint me along with her."

After the killing of a lion, buffalo, leopard, or elephant, peace has to be made with that animal's ayana. At this ritual the killer has to be

assisted by a so-called *'waila'*, a general name for any close assistant in a ritual. This *waila* is preferably one of his companions at the hunt. But to be the first *waila* (there may be several of them) he needs to be an obo if the killer is an obo, and a tchora, if the killer is a tchora.

e. Sacrifice for a father's and mother's ayana

This was one of the more important domestic rituals at the time when the Matcha were not yet Christians. Ideally this sacrifice of a bull (for the father) or an old cow (for the mother) should have been performed only in case of sickness or some other kind of misfortune, which was experienced as a punishment for untruthfulness to the father's or mother's ayana, in other words, to the things they had been taught by their parents. Food and drink were put on their grave and an older man and woman were invited to take their place at the ritual meal.

> "I invited an old man and woman. They had to resemble somewhat my father and mother. Since my father and mother were tchora, they, too, had to be tchora. On that day, they were father and mother to me. I put a *sirre* (a low primitive table made for the occasion) for them in our backroom (the gifts for the dead had also been put on a *sirre* near the graves) and I placed them sitting there, face to face, my 'father' nearest to the backwall (the ritually higher place). 'Eat and drink in my father's and mother's place', I said to them. When, after the meal, they blessed me, this blessing was to me as the blessing of my father and mother." (Shagerdi Bukko)

f. Atete

Atete is an exclusively women's ritual. In former times, it was performed every year by all women who were not beyond childbearing according to their age. Later, under the influence of Christianity, it was more generally performed by women who feared they would have no more children and who wished to have a further child.

On this occasion a goat is slaughtered and the blood poured out on the woman's breast and belly. The sacrifice is brought to the woman's ayana on whom her fertility depends.

The goat is killed preferably by her mother's brother (women are forbidden to kill), but the pouring out and sprinkling of the blood is done by her neighbour women.

> "If the woman concerned is an obo, a tchora woman will do this. She is as a mother to her. She blesses her as a mother blesses her daughter, saying: 'O ayana of my child, be good to her, have mercy on her. Hear my prayer: give her a child, give her good health (that she may have a child).'
> Two obo and two tchora women grind the maize from which the *marqa* (ritual porridge) is made. It is eaten by all women."
> (An old woman)

g. Adoption

> "If I would adopt a child, I could only adopt a child of an obo, since I am an obo myself. My adoptive child must be a tchora."
> (Shagerdi Bukko)

h. Marriage

It is still the custom that a bride-to-be is given a protector, whose task it is to advice and to support her in the hardships of married life, especially in regard to her husband and her in-laws. He is chosen by the groom himself from among his best friends. He should be an obo, if the groom and his bride are tchora. As with the *kennata* of a levirate marriage, this law is intended to prevent sexual intercourse between them. This friend, indeed (his name is *'minje'*) is the only man who is permitted to pay her a visit when her husband is from home. He is also the only man in whose house she can take refuge when she has need.

We have already mentioned that at the first sexual intercourse on wedding-day, the girl is assisted by a woman and the boy by a man. Both of them should be obo if the groom is an obo, and tchora if he is a tchora.

7. Little herdsmen, obo and tchora

Gammachu Magarsa is speaking here.

> "When we were guarding our cattle, being a tchora myself, I liked to make my bull fight the bull of an obo boy. I would urge my bull on, shouting: 'Go ahead, o tchora. Beat him, my

tchora!' And I am sure, my bull understood me. If my bull lost the fight, I wept. After this we boys often started fighting ourselves. At times, bigger boys would join us and it became a real fight with sticks. When blood was drawn, even our parents got involved and the whole affair could end up into big trouble.

We also sang obo and tchora songs, while leading our cattle to the river. If you are a good singer, the cattle remain together more readily and they do not escape right or left. Obo and tchora boys with different herds would lead their cattle to the same drinking place. The point then was who would reach the drinking place first.

Being a tchora I would sing:

Obee, obaan, obee!	*Obee, obaan, obee!*
Obee laga Tchore.	*Obee,* up towards the Tchore river.
Obee jenann qore.	I feel proud while saying *'Obee!'*
Korma 'boon guddise	A bull brought up by *obo*
jebbi tchorat kufise.	a *tchora*-calf makes him fall (in a fight).
Obee, obaan, obee!	*Obee, obaan, obee!*

[The first and the last line have no clear meaning. We can only assert that it has something to do with watering the cattle, since *'oba'* means 'drinking place' and *'obasu'* means 'watering the cattle'. Tchore: source.]

To which the obo boy would reply from some distance:

Obee, obaan, obee!	*Obee, obaan, obee!*
Obee laga Hidda.	*Obee,* up to the Hidda river.
Obee jenaan didda?	When I sing *'Obee'* why don't you run fast?
Obasen borresa.	Having watered them I'll make the river muddy (for your cattle, *o tchora*).
Borun barbadesa.	I will not even leave behind muddy water (for you).
Ooboo ilkan badesa.	*Obo* have fine (big white) front-teeth.
Tchora, maal odesa?	What has a *tchora* to say to this?
Obee, obaan, obee!	*Obee, obaan, obee!*

[He gives the river another name as if to say: "It is our river, not yours." *Hidda:* meandering as a root or a vein.]

Chapter 26

HIRIYA

Every Matcha keeps with him for life the social status ascribed to him by his descent. He can be a first or a second rate *borana,* a *gabaro* of a descendant of freed slaves. But there are groups in which these differences are consciously overlooked. These groups are the *'hiriya'*. The word *'hiriya'* is often translated by 'age-mates' and, in fact, in many cases this is its meaning, but from of old, the stress lies more on social equality than on equality of age.

By the time the gada system was in full vigour – and to western Matcha this is somewhat before they definitely settled in the extreme west – all men of the same gada-set, whatever their age, had to pass through several grades of social adulthood, or social responsibility, before their set reached its period of rule.[36]

Only a few vague memories of these former gada-grades have survived, but the concept of *hiriya* continues to play an important part in the people's everyday life.

Between *hiriya* we find no barriers in social intercourse; differences in descent are overlooked and so are rules of precedence and even what in society at large are considered to be good manners.

> *"Hiriya* are equals. They can speak and sing together about everything. They can use *'dubbi yelo* – shameful words', they can freely insult one another in a playful way. When they are youths or men they can go together in search of sexual adventure. There is no *saffu* between them, no distance, no form of respect."

Being one another's *hiriya* involves a right to mutual help; lasting friendships between *hiriya* are common; following from which the word *'hiriya'* has also a connotation of 'friend'.

The cohesion between *hiriya* is also stressed in a more negative way by their custom of insulting other groups. It is noteworthy, however, that, in this case, the others should be out of hearing-distance.

[36] In western Matchaland every boy was *'raba'* from his birth onwards, and remained a *'raba'* until the day he slaughtered his *butta* bull in the fourth year of his gada-set's ruling period, after which he became *'luba'* (a man in the full service of his country). Four years later, after he had been circumcised, he became *'lubabaesa'*, a man who had performed his service. Another name for such a man was *'gula'*.

1. Groups of hiriya

Nowadays, we still find several groups of people who call one another *'hiriya'* and are referred to as such by others. The degree of cohesion differs.

a. Girls

All girls from puberty onwards are hiriya. Due to the fact that their social contacts are so limited and closely watched, they form the closest group of all.

They go out together to fetch water and to collect firewood; they go together to dance, either among themselves or with boys; they work together in the fields, weeding or harvesting. Particularly while weeding, they sing songs of their own, mostly songs they will later sing at wedding-parties (institutional insult of their parents and of the bride and bridegroom; good-bye songs for the bride to be if she is one of them; songs for the bride's advisor and for her mother) and songs they sing in honour of buffalo-killers. Other songs are ancient songs in honour of warriors.

In most of these songs sex is dealt with very markedly, which, together with the insult they contain, accounts for their being sung out of hearing range.

Finally, most of these songs stress, again and again, their happy youth and their feelings of togetherness as hiriya. An example of the latter:

Yemmu wal genyu,	As long as we come together,
walgenye tenyu,	and sit down together,
Sakko, nu baaddhu,	O Sakkoland, carry us,
sirre fakaaaddhu.	be like a bed to us.
Yemmy gargarbanu,	When we are separated (by marriage),
yemmu farfarchanu,	when we are scattered,
biyo, nu nyaaddhu,	o soil, eat us,
qille fakaaddhu.	be like a grave to us.

All of them are hiriya one to another, regardless of their age; as this is very marked in another stanza, also taken from a girl's good-bye song, sung to one of their number who is about to marry:

Bar dhengadda yonale,	Last year at this time,
hiriya durbatika,	(you were) a hiriya of the girls,
michu dargagotika.	a lover of the youths.
Baranamo yonale,	This year at the same time,
hiriya refatika,	(you are) a hiriya of corpses,
michu naddhenitika.	a lover of married women.
	[Women are referred to as 'corpses', since they have been 'pierced' by sexual intercourse.]

An example of a song women sing only among themselves is the following. It tells of relations with lovers in their husband's absence:

Inni waya dacha rasa	Wrapped in dirty clothes
gara Anfilo achi kata.	he sets out for Anfilo.
Daaku 'nqabdu, ya hiriyako,	Do you have flour, o my hiriya,
qittaen duka tchalasa?	that I may make qitta and throw them after him?
	[Many men go to Anfilo to work there or to take care for their coffee. When they stay away too long, they are liable to be suspected by their wives of having a lover there. *Qitta:* tasteless small rolls]
Inni kuta walalasa;	The other one is well dressed (her lover);
borron dhufe nat hasasa.	he approaches the backwall and whispers to me (through the wall)
Shito 'nqabdu, ya hiriyako,	Do you have parfum, o my hiriya,
kutasat an dhangalasa?	that I may pour it on his dress?

Nowadays, women rarely form a workgroup of their own, but they still may sing such songs in their houses. In their birth-songs *obo* and *tchora* women still insult one another in a playful way as *hiriya* can do (see the previous chapter).

c. Young boys

My assistant Gammachu Magarsa who is of a rather traditional lineage still distinguished two groups of *hiriya* among younger boys: one from three to eight years of age and another from eight to sixteen years. He pointed out, however, that tchora and obo boys of the same age could by no means be hiriya, "since they are father and son". According to him, until recently, this was the case also for the next group.

d. Youths from sixteen years onwards

They like to form work-cooperatives, to go dancing together with the girls, and, on occasion, to go out in search of sexual adventures.

> It is our feeling that boys should not have sexual intercourse befor they are sixteen years old; and even then, we do not like them to indulge frequently. Our people feel that it is good for a boy to restrain himself in this matter, since this will keep his sperm strong and will give him a strong eldest son.
>
> When I was still a boy all boys younger than sixteen, both borana and gabaro, used to wear a *'rogge'*, a hair-style achieved by shaving both sides of the skull, leaving a bridge of hair in the middle. It was like the *qarre* (tonsure) of the girls; it was the hair-style of a virgin boy. But already at that time, many boys affected the hair-style without clinging to the practice it was supposed to demonstrate." (Gammachu Magarsa)

Here follow two songs that boys over sixteen sing when they are among themselves.

The first is addressed to married men:

Baddesa laga sariti	The badesa tree at the Sariti river;
qelon birraa gubatera.	the qelo-plants of the birra season were ablaze.
Baddesa, ya warra niti:	You are lost, o married fellow:
qeron sirra fudhatera.	a youth took your wife away from you.

[In the dry season after the heavy rains the *badesa (wadesa)* tree with its white, fragrant flowers is in full blossom – a symbol of the youths themselves.

The *sariti* or wild asperagus has sexual connotations.
At the same season, people burn the dry grass, among which many *qelo*-plants are found – the fire is a symbol of sexual passion.]

The next song is an example of a 'song with shameful words':

Yemmu ishen buddean baftu,	While she takes the bread from the fire,
an ibsa balbal godhera.	I let in the light through the door (while opening it).
Yemmu ishen guddeda raftu,	While she moves her thighs,
an finchan farfas godhera.	I already sprinkle my sperm.

[She uncovers the fire, he lets the light in, and both sources of light meet one another.]

e. Younger married men

Their activities as hiriya are parallel to those of the former group, but strictly separated. They often sing the same songs, but, despite this, they never sing them together with hiriya of other groups. The same holds good for all men's groups.

f. Older married men

By the time they are fourty years old, married men have passed to another hiriya group, the group of mature men who are supposed to play a part in their community as go-betweens for wedding-negotiations and as peacemakers, and who have a say in decision making with regard to the country's well-being.

g. Old men

They consider each other to be hiriya. Men of the former group never address them as equals.

For all these hiriya groups the words of my assistant Ensermu hold good:

"Being among hiriya is always better. Hiriya can joke and sing as much as they like; they can talk about anything; they need not to be ashamed of one another."

As in all fields of social life we also find compromise in behaviour between hiriya-groups. Older girls may join married women; newly married men often continue for some time to work and sing with their former hiriya; men in their thirties who gained prestige in the country my be accepted in the hiriya-group of older married men.

Chapter 27

THE CONCEPT OF SAFFU

In the course of this book we have several times referred to '*saffu*' and have given short definitions of the concept. However, these short notes were insufficient to do justice to this important concept in Matcha everyday life and to the frequent and varied use of the word saffu in everyday speech.

1. The word 'saffu' in the Matcha's daily speech

A few examples:

a) Two men are trying to pull up a big tree-trunk. In spite of their toiling they have to abandon their endeavours for the present. One of them heaves a sigh, saying: "*Saffudha* – It is saffu."

b) For the first time in their life people see a plane take off. The iron bird with people in its belly disappears in the sky, roaring. Visibly upset an old man remarks: "*Saffudha* – It is saffu."

c) A man has just escaped being run over by a car. Still upset by his narrow escape, he concludes his account by saying: "*Saffudha* – It is saffu."

d) A wild bull causes trouble in the herd over and over again. The herdsman after commenting on the beast's unpredictable and quarrelsome behaviour, states disapprovingly: "*Saffudha* – It is saffu."

e) An old woman, beloved by her neighbours because of her helpfulness, has fallen sick. Her own children scarcely pay any attention to her. She has already been suffering for months. A neighbour woman has brought her some buttermilk. After leaving the house, she heaves a sigh, genuinely saddened by the old woman's fate: "*Saffudha* – It is saffu."

f) Parents discussing the problems entailed in bringing-up children in modern times, speak of their children's lack of respect for traditional values, their current indifference to their parents' orders and wishes. In the end, they condense their feelings in the statement: "*Saffu kan saniti* – It is their saffu."

g) Someone has committed a very evil deed. His brother says to him reproachfully: "*Saffuketi* – It is your saffu." To which the other replies in self-defense: "*Saffu kanko miti. Saffu kan Waqati* – It is not my saffu. Saffu is of Waqa."

h) While speaking about his relations with his son, a man says: "I would like to be more friendly with my son and show him how much I love him. But I cannot deal with him as I can with my grandson: "*Nui wollitti saffudha* – We are saffu towards one another."

i) While speaking of alternate generations (both called *'obo'* or *'tchora'*) somebody remarks: "*Obo* and *obo* can play with one another, even if their ages diverge widely; they can joke with one another. Especially a grandmother and her little grandson can do this. There is less respect; both of them are *obo* or *tchora*; they are like friends: "*Saffu wollitti hintaani* – They are not saffu towards one another."

It becomes clear from these examples:

* That the word *'saffu'* is used at some times as an adjective, and at others as a substantive.
* That it is used with regard to widely different situations. Sometimes it has a clearly religious implication, sometimes it refers to such trivial situations that any religious implication seems to be excluded.
* That it is only possible to extract its precise meaning from these examples with the help of the people themselves and some previous knowledge of their socio-religious values and customs and their concept of the superhuman.

2. Matcha comments

"*Saffu* stands for everything that we do not understand, including a person's evil deeds. When my youngest sister is, sometimes, very disobedient, my mother will say: '*Saffu kanseti* – It is her saffu.' It is like saying: 'How can you be this way, my child? How do you dare to behave this way?' " (Mirresa Gamtesa)

"Having *saffu* means that you know how to behave according to the laws of our ancestors. Once I had to make peace before the elders. According to our custom I brought some *tchokorsa* grass with me; another man had other grass in his hands. The elders asked him: 'Why didn't you bring tchokorsa grass; is not tchokorsa the grass of peace and blessing?' To me they said: 'You did the right thing. You know saffu.' " (Asafa Disasa)

"A younger boy may not sit on a higher stool than older boys. If he does, people say: 'He does not know *saffu*.' "
(Mirresa Gamtesa)

"People say *'saffu'* when they hear of things they do not want to hear. They also say *'saffu'* of things they do not understand; it is as if they say: 'We do not understand these things. Only Waqa knows.' " (Waquma Tollera)

From an interview of the author and his assistant Asafa Disasa:

Q.: "What then of the word *'dinqi'* which also means 'mysterious'? Don't you say on occasion: *'Dinqisisadha* — It is something we do not understand in him?' "
A.: "It is true we use the word 'dinqi'. We use it for example when we see someone doing things which are very, very difficult, things no one else in the country can do. But, while speaking thus, we never think of Waqa, but only think of that person who is so clever. When we say *'saffu'*, however, even if we do not think of Waqa at that precise moment, there is always something of Waqa in it."
Q.: "What of that tree-trunk these two men were unable to pull up and about one of them saying: 'It is saffu.'?"
A.: "It is like saying: 'Waqa has made this tree-trunk stronger than man.' "
Q.: "What about the old man who saw the plane taking off and said: 'It is saffu.'?"
A.: " do not think he thought of Waqa at that precise moment, but there is something in his words suggesting: it is beyond human understanding, beyond human power."
Q.: "You also remember that man who had such a narrow escape from death."
A.: "Yes, I remember. He too, said: 'It is saffu.' But as I see it, at the depth of his feeling was something rather like this: 'It is Waqa who saved me; no man could have done it.' "
Q.: "What of that wild bull of whom the herdsman said: 'It is saffu.'?"
A.: "He wanted to say: 'That bull's ayana is very, very wild.' "
Q.: "You yourself gave me the example of that woman who brought buttermilk to her sick neighbour who had been ill for a long time and had always been good to people. She, too, said: 'It is saffu.' "
A.: "She was at a loss to understand why Waqa made that good old woman suffer so much."

Q.: "We also spoke of that man who committed an evil deed. His brother said to him: 'It is your saffu', and he replied: 'It is not my saffu. Saffu is of Waqa.' "
A.: "Yes, I remember. Indeed, people often speak this way. On occasion, they will also say: *'Saffu kan Waqaf lafati* – Saffu comes from Waqa and the earth.' "

"It is Waqa's will that saffu exists. He does not want saffu to disappear from among us. Saffu is something from Waqa and the earth. When the saffu disappears nothing is left.
At their Yarabbi ritual under a tree the women would pray for a sick man if he asked, and Waqa heard their prayers, because in those times the women still knew saffu.
Saffu means paying respect. Hiriya do not recognize saffu among themselves, but my children exhibit saffu towards me. Saffu is not something in them, nor is it in me, it is between us: they pay respect to me and I pay respect to them, and we do this in many different ways. We say: we are saffu towards one another.
Obo and tchora are saffu towards one another. The eldest son and his younger brother are saffu towards one another. When there is saffu, Waqa is near to man. It is Waqa who created saffu. Waqa does not like people who abandon saffu."
(Shagerdi Bukko)

"In former times, people said: 'You should not step on food that Waqa has given to people.' There are still people who, when they see some maize lying lost on the road, put a few grains in their pockets to show their respect for it. Such food and man are saffu to one another. Where there is saffu, there should be respect. When there is no longer saffu, nothing remains."
(A middle aged man)

"Nowadays, people do not care for saffu anymore. But without saffu all good disappears; without saffu nothing is 'full' (perfect, good).
We have to abide by it on the road. We have to abide by it at our work. Saffu is everywhere." (Harme Dinqa, an old woman)

An important though silent comment is the custom some old people have of bowing their head while pronouncing the word 'saffu'.

It is evident from these comments that saffu is a socio-religious concept of the highest importance in Matcha life.

Still the most illuminating comment is that given by the great solemn saffu ritual as it was performed every eighth year by the gada-set that was about to come into power.

3. Saying the saffu and beating the law

Every eighth year, when it was the turn of one of the five gada-sets to take over the responsibility for their people's well-being, this group accepted once more ritually the saffu from Waqa's hands and proclaimed anew the law of Makko Billi, their great law-giver. The two rites had quite a different character, though they were associated within time and place. Both of them were, in the Matcha's eyes, the very bases of their society, given to them by Waqa. The difference between them is that the saffu was given to them by Waqa himself from the very beginning, whilst the law of Makko Billi came to them through people, through their great leaders, given to them by Waqa.

a. Makko Billi and his laws

In Matcha oral tradition Makko Billi's appearance coincides with their birth as a distinct Oromo tribe, when they emerged from the water of the Ghibe river. It was at this moment that Makko Billi, according to their myths, proclaimed his law.

Makko Billi's law coincides in practice with the gada-laws which comprise among other things, the law of the gada-system as such, laws about annual public rituals (new-year ritual, thanksgiving for the harvest, etc.) and many other laws such as those regarding transgressions against other people's rights. By virtue of the same laws every man is king in his own compound, which ensures that the gada-laws do not interfere with an individual's domestic affairs.

However, Makko Billi was not the founder of the Oromo's gada-system.

> "His law was not of his own making. He told us what other *raji* (people who know the future and help others to abide by Waqa's laws) had said already. He was a *raji* himself. This custom and that and such another custom ... it was he who passed them on to us. It is from him that the 'six (grandsons) of Sayo' heard them.

Those who turn away from this law, turn away from Waqa. Those who abide by it, abide by Waqa's law.
It was also Makko Billi who ordered us to proclaim his law anew and to accept the saffu from Waqa's hands every eighth year, and who told us how this should be done." (Shagerdi Bukko)

In these last words Shagerdi Bukko clearly points to a difference between the saffu and Makko Billi's law. In the next statement he is even more explicit:

"The law of Makko Billi was a good law; so it was that people accepted it. The saffu comes from Waqa and the earth. We never say: 'Saffu comes from Makko Billi'; we always say: 'Saffu comes from Waqa.' Nor do we ever speak of the *law of saffu;* we only speak of the law of Makko Billi."

b. The two rituals

We now turn to the ritual by which the Matcha, every eighth year, re-confirmed their society's moral norms.

The ritual was performed on a mountain, i.e. closer to Waqa (in fact it was for our area the Garaa Mao – the mountain of the Mao) under an oda tree – a symbol of truth, truthfulness, integrity – and preferably in mist or drizzle, in which Waqa comes down to man (the ritual time was during the rainy season).

It was invariably performed during the latter part of the night when people are awaiting the first light of dawn, a symbol of the new gada-period which was about to begin. Here follows the account of Shagerdi Bukko:

"While all those who were about to take over the ruling of the country were seated under the oda tree, two men stepped forward. They took their stand opposite one another, one facing the west, the other the east. The one standing in the east had to be a *borana*, since it is in the east that our people were born. The man standing in the west (and facing the east), a *gabaro*, invited him to say the *saffu*. (1=the borana, 2=the gabaro)

2. Kottu.	Come.
1. Dhufe.	I have come.
2. Akka ati dhufte,	As you have come
tolan biatti hadhufu.	so may good come to the country (people).

1. Saffu nan jedha.	I am going to say the saffu.
	[At this both men knelt down, bowing their heads. All the others remained seated.]
1. Koratinif fani wolli saffudha.	Thorns and the soles of the feet are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.
	[Everyone joined in the response.]
1. Qubinif gufun wolli saffudha.	Toes and tree-trunks are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.
1. Daaranif daakun wolli saffudha.	Ashes and flour are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.
1. Horrinif bishaan wolli saffudha.	Mineral water and (ordinary) water are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.
1. Thinnanif guddaan wolli saffudha.	Small and great are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.
1. Jarsinif ijolle wolli saffudha.	Old and young are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.
1. Garbichif goftaan wolli saffudha.	Slave and master are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.
1. Garbittinif gifti wolli saffudha.	Slave-maid and mistress are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.
1. Intalinif hati wolli saffudha.	Daughter and mother are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.

1. Ilminif abbaan wolli saffudha.	Son and father are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.
1. Oobonif tchoraan wolli saffudha.	Obo and tchora are saffu to one another.
2. EYE, SAFFUDHAKA.	YES, THEY ARE SAFFU, INDEED.
Saffu maal jettere, ya jalaye?	Why did you say the saffu, o my honourable companion?
1. Saffun kun kan Waqaaf kan lafaa.	This saffu is of Waqa and the earth.

Only after this did they turned to the law of Makko Billi. It was proclaimed in the same way, i.e. by two men facing one another, standing this time, however, not kneeling. The proclamation of every law was confirmed by a crack of the whip. This whip was made from hippopotamus-skin, the toughest material possible, a symbol of the law itself, and through its origin associated with water, which means life. It is because of this that Matcha say that their law is 'beaten'.

The difference between the two rituals was stressed without equivocation by all my informants.

> "While beating the law of men they stand;
> while saying Waqa's saffu, they kneel down.
> This saffu is like a prayer; while pronouncing it they pay honour to Waqa by kneeling." (Shagerdi Bukko)

> "Saying the saffu means paying honour to Waqa; the law of Makko Billi is beaten."
> "When a rich and powerful man presents a poor man with something very worthwhile, for example a gun, the poor man should accept this present on his knees.
> We took the gada-law from men, that's why we beat it while standing.
> The saffu comes from Waqa and the earth, that's why we accept it kneeling." (Waquma Tollera)

Other gestures of the two men who pronounce the saffu shed further light on this subject. They not only kneel, they do not only bow their

heads, they also place their hands down on the earth and then turn them upwards in a gesture of supplication and of receiving. They may also take some tchokorsa grass in their hands, which is often found growing on the spot, and lift it up towards the sky in a gesture of supplication: grant us life, grant us fertility, grant us peace.

4. The gada-system as a shrine for ancient values

Makko Billi's law, in the people's eyes, is a further application of the saffu. It gives more concrete rules for the distance to be maintained between adjacent generations; it embodies the Oromo's dislike of permanent leaders by the maintenance of a system of five gada-sets who, in turn, take responsibility of their people's well-being; it stresses the need for a *quppa*-ritual after the shedding of human blood and fixes the blood-prices after manslaughter; it protects the saffu by administering punishments; it prescribes a set of well-defined rituals to be performed by the gada-set in office to assure Waqa's blessing; it even goes into detail about the way these and other rituals must be performed – details which, most probably existed even before the gada-system was introduced.

An example of the latter is to be found in the purification ritual after transgressions against the saffu which Waqa established between obo and tchora and between people of the same blood. Makko Billi's law on this runs as follows:

Ooboof tchora yo wollitti darbe,	If an obo and a tchora overstep the boundary between one another (by sexual intercourse),
yo kara maale hojete,	if they forsake the right way,
hadhiqamu, hatchuppamu.	they must be washed and immersed.
Dhigni dhigatti yo darbe,	When blood passes the boundary which separates it from (the same) blood,
hadhiqamu, hatchuppamu,	he, the one who shed it, must be washed and immersed,
korma yakka habasu.	and he must pay a 'bull of guilt'.
Tuma Makko Billi kanama.	Such is the 'beating' of Makko Billi.

The Matcha's idea that older people are nearer to Waqa and because of this are the leaders designate at any ritual, was given concrete form

in the gada-institution of the gula or lubabaesa, those people who had gone through all the rituals and public services of the gada-system, and who became the 'priests' of their people and the advisors of the gada-set in power.

5. Saffu and the concept of sin

Matcha see the world and, particularly their own society, as Waqa's creation in which all things have been given a place of their own according to the specific ayana of each. All are unique and different from one another. As people put it themselves from their more pragmatic point of view: "They must keep distance from each other; each of them has to follow his own way; they must not overstep the boundaries put between them by Waqa; they must not get mixed up."

Man must conform to this cosmic and social order. If he does not, he acts against the saffu.

Their use of the word *'ballesu'* is worth noting in this regard. *'Ballesu'* is often used for 'sinning', but it means in fact 'to destroy, to damage, to spoil'. Not only is man's relationship with Waqa spoiled, but Waqa's creation itself, and the latter consideration is the more important in the Matcha's eyes. This aspect and some others of their view of Waqa and saffu are clearly indicated in the following interview I conducted with Gammachu Magarsa.

> *Q.:* "Is there any difference between what the orthodox priests and protestants taught you about Waqa and sin and your own view of things as an Oromo?"
> *A.:* "Yes, there is.
> We Oromo believe that Waqa has created all things, but we did not know of a Garden of Eden. The bible tells us that Waqa was walking there in the cool of the day and that Adam and Eve could speak with him. This we like very much: it is our own Waqa.
> Our ancestors, too, had stories of Waqa walking on the earth in the shape of an old man. In those days at the very beginning of time, people could speak with Waqa and ask him everything. Our fathers also said that Waqa withdrew from man because man did not keep to the saffu Waqa had created in this world; but they did not tell us that Waqa himself meted out punishments to people. The orthodox priests told us of hell. The Presbyterians and Adventists told us that people who drink and dance will be thrown into hell. This is not our Waqa.

The Adventists also told us of a great judgement-day on which everyone who is not baptized will be thrown by Waqa into hell. This is not our Waqa."

Q.: "But in the gospel itself you find a story about the Last Judgement."

A.: "That is true, and I have read and heard it many times. In this story Jesus Christ says to the good people: 'Come you who have won my Father's blessing. Come with me, stay with me, have eternal life.' This we understand: it is our own Waqa who speaks thus. Jesus also says that all those good people will be with him for ever, because they upheld the saffu and were good to other people. This, too, we understand: wherever saffu is to be found there is Waqa.

But after this there comes something that has always puzzled me: it is the words of Jesus to the evil ones: 'Go away from me into the eternal fire.' This we do not understand. Here Jesus is not acting like our Waqa would. Waqa would only have turned away his face from them.

However, you have told me that Jesus Christ did not have a real fire in mind, but that it is a *milikita* (a symbol): it stands for the worst thing that can happen to man: being left alone by Waqa for ever. This, again, we understand: it is our Waqa who withdraws from them. Such is the fate of everyone who does not keep to the saffu.

Saffu is not a law inflicting all kinds of punishments for evil-doers, like the laws of man. This is why it is not proclaimed with a whip. The saffu is not 'beaten': it is accepted from Waqa's hands with prayer. It is something Waqa created in this world and in the heart of man. It is a thing that all good people like. So it is that we have a saying: '*Wan namni jalatu Waqni jalata* – What people like Waqa likes also.' To us, Oromo, sin (*tchubbu*) is always something against saffu; it is always something that breaks peace among people. What does not harm other people is no sin."

Q.: "But, Gammachu, what of a man who disregards saffu and steals an axe from another man? If no one knows who is the thief, the man is still in peace with everyone. What sin then has he committed?"

A.: "True, nobody knows that this man has stolen the axe, but the own owner knows that it has been stolen, and his peace is disturbed. He and his family feel 'eaten' (harmed) by other peo-

ple, they know that saffu is lessened in the country; they feel less friendly towards all other people. In addition, Waqa withdraws from the thief: that's not good for his family.

Q.: "I agree, but let me give another example. A man and a woman have committed serious incest, but no one knows about it. Whose peace then is disturbed?"

A.: "Both of them overstepped the boundary between them; both of them failed to respect the saffu Waqa put between them. So Waqa withdraws from them, and the woman will give birth to a child without arms or legs. Her husband's lineage will be very, very angry, because she brought such a child into their lineage. 'She and that man made Waqa withdraw from us,' they will say."

Q.: "Take a man who wants to steal a very fine cow from another man. For weeks he thinks about doing this; his heart is full of it, day and night. Then quite unexpectedly, that fine cow dies. Now the man leaves all thought of stealing, but for many weeks his heart was filled with it. Do you think this man has sinned by these bad thoughts?"

A.: "What did he spoil? Nothing. What did he do against saffu? Nothing. I know that the Christian priests say that he was sinning; but we Oromo, we do not say so."

Chapter 28

AN ASPECT OF SAFFU BETWEEN MAN AND ANIMAL

1. Customs in everyday life

Everywhere in Matchaland certain animals, birds and insects constitute a permanent threat to the people's domestic animals and their crops.

Towards harvest-time people have to defend their crops day and night against such predators as monkeys, porcupines, antelopes, and birds. During the day-time, they do this preferably while sitting on top of a primitive platform in the midst of their fields.

The shouting of children in order to frighten away the monkeys and birds is one of the characteristic sounds in the countryside during the last weeks before harvest-time.

While doing this the children will scold the robbers and even pelt them with stones; in short, they will behave in a very impolite way towards them. "But since they are children," people say, "the monkeys and birds do not feel too insulted."

But for grown-up people matters are different. As my young assistant Asafa Disasa put it:

> "People do not like a man who curses the monkeys and birds, when they come to eat his crops. I know a man who is always doing so, and each year the monkeys come into his maize more than into that of his neighbours. 'If he continues cursing the monkeys in this way,' people say, 'they will eat his maize still more every year. They understand what he is saying and they will return, again and again, to steal more and more from his crops.' Such a man will shout to the monkeys: 'You eat my maize: may Waqa eat (kill) you.'
> But a good man will say: 'May Waqa cause you to feel satisfied with little.' He will not scream loudly; rather he will address them in a low voice: 'Ushe, ushe, ushe ... now go, and may you feel also satisfied with the little you have eaten.' In this way he will also talk to the porcupines and the wild pigs who come in the night. True, nowadays, people will sometimes kill a monkey but, generally speaking, they are not worried over much at the monkeys' presence in their country."

Matcha do not think of exterminating such harmful animals as monkeys, porcupines, wild pigs, antelopes, wild cats, and the like, still less of killing birds, which are seen as messengers from Waqa.

My own endeavours to induce boys to suffocate porcupines in their holes did not meet with much success.

People prefer to keep watch on their crops day and night at considerable pains to themselves rather than exterminating the pests systematically.

The same is to be seen with regard to their chicks, many of which are taken by wild cats and birds of prey. They suffer the loss with the same equanimity that they undergo the setbacks of the various seasons.

> "People have a feeling that it is good when the monkeys eat from their maize. 'What is left will be the better,' they say."
> (Mirresa Gamtesa)

> "It is good if the monkeys eat our maize. If we feed them, it brings blessing. Sometimes, they eat too much. This then is a punishment of Waqa. In such a case people pray Waqa that he may not turn away his face from them." (Shagerdi Bukko)

> "People are not angry with the birds and animals when they eat their grain. True, they chase them away, but in former times they would always do so with soft words without insulting them. They would say: '*Ushe, ushe,* may Waqa make you feel satisfied with little.' Waqa has given man more grain than he has given to the animals and birds, and if the latter come to eat from it, they do this with Waqa's permission; without it they would not come. Waqa himself causes them to do so: it their ayana. Therefore man should never curse them by shouting: '*Muuuuuu, muuuuuu!*' and he should never say to them in anger: 'May Waqa 'eat' you!' " (Waquma Tollera)

> "Nowadays, people say: 'The crows and weevils eat nearly all our maize.' But this is because they no longer abide by the customs of our fathers." (An old man)

> "You give to the birds and animals from your field and from your grain-stores that they may bless you, and so you do with your chicks and sheep. We believe that Waqa can make them satisfied with little. Didn't Jesus do the same, when he fed a

huge crowd of people with seven loaves and a few small fish? So it is that when a lion has taken a cow and roars, people say: 'There will be peace in the country: the 'big father' (the lion) has blessed us.' "

(Gammachu Magarsa)

[Peace: not only mutual agreement between people but also its effects: Waqa's blessing in every aspect of life.]

"Waqa himself blesses us, if we do not begrudge the animals their share in what he has given us. He blesses us, because we uphold his saffu, the saffu he has put between us and the birds and animals. If the baboon comes slowly into our maize, he will take what he needs and run away with it. But if you insult him he may well grow angry and start destroying your maize only for the sake of destroying it. Don't forget: Waqa did not teach him to sow and to plough; therefore he allowed him to take a little from what man has cultivated. His ayana is different from ours. So it is that we must watch our animals and crops but, at the same time, we must abide by the saffu Waqa put between us and the animals.

It is therefore that we cannot be rough against the birds. It is therefore that we do not only say to them: 'May Waqa make you satisfied with little', but that we also implore their pity. When I was still a young boy and I saw many *abba gaya* (little birds with a long waving tail) in my barley, I used to sing:

Abba gáya	O *abba gaya*
yá tchorrísa,	who says *'tchorre'*,
míḑhan qíṫte;	my grain is only half for me;
	(I have to give half of it to the owner of the land)
áti yo fíṫe,	if you finish all of it,
járṣa déga	me, poor man,
máal an éga?	why do I watch my grain?

If the animals and birds bless Waqa because of the food we give them, it is very good. The birds praise Waqa every morning, and in this way they make this earth a place where Waqa is praised, a place of blessing to all of us. Killing birds is a great sin."

(A young man)

2. The lion

Among the wild animals the lion ranks highest in the Matcha's eyes; the male lion that is, for the lionness is distrusted and feared. They call him *'moti* – king, ruler, powerful one', as in the song

Birbĭrsa móti múka;	The birbirsa is the moti of the trees;
Birbĭr motĭ galána;	the Birbir is the moti of the rivers;
dalé motĭ binénsa.	the lion is the moti of the wild animals.

They also call him *'abba gudda* – the big father'. Still his most honourable name is *'borana'*. "The lion is the borana among the wild animals."

As with a borana among people, the lion is pre-eminently an animal of blessing and peace among the wild animals. Like the borana among people the lion is considered as nearest to Waqa in the animal world. Not in the same sense that a sheep is called an animal of peace, but in the sense that he of all wild animals abides by the saffu Waqa has created in this world. Other animals may fall short in blessing those people who do not grudge them a modest share in their domestic animals and crops, but the lion never forgets. In addition, since he is a borana, his blessing is more powerful than that of other animals.

> "Whenever a lion has taken a cow, he always blesses its owner. When he first sets eyes on a man, he never attacks him. When we meet him, he looks at us and goes his way. If someone fires at him, he does not run away but comes up to him at oncc. It is only when he has grown very weak and old, that he may lie in wait near a path to attack people.
> When we hear him roaring in the night, we say: 'The year will be good.'
> If, in the morning, we see his footprints near a church, we say: 'Big father came here to pray last night.' "

He proves his boranaship in other ways as well:

> "The lion never eats an animal's forelegs and refuses to eat a prey that has fallen on its left side.
>
> [Any animal that is slaughtered should fall on its right side. An Oromo mounts

his horse from the right side. All dancing and passing around a house or a tree is done anti-clockwise. When seating, the right side is the side of honour.]

At the moment I caught sight of the lion, he had just killed two wild pigs and a big antelope. Both pigs had fallen on their left side, but the antelope had fallen on its right. Accordingly, the lion had only eaten from the antelope." (An old hunter)

"The lion's ayana is very strong but at the same time it is magnanimous and gentle and full of respect for saffu.
People tend to believe that the lion is the first born among the wild animals, just as the borana are the first born among men."
(Gammachu Magarsa)

One day, I was invited to witness a ritual of thanksgiving following the birth of a calf. The young man who had invited me was my assistant Ensermu. The mother-cow concerned was his. She was a daughter of his first cow which was eaten by a lion. The story of this incident as he had told it me, was as follows:

"It happened about ten years ago. I had a cow which had already given birth to two calves, a cow-calf and, more recently, a bull-calf. One evening I went to bring my cow home, where the little bull-calf was waiting for her. But my cow went mad and ran away, back to the grazing ground. I went after her, but she did not stop running; I could not catch up with her. It was growing dark already, and so I decided to go home and to ask my father's help. But I could not find him. My mother forbade me to go out again. When my father came home that night, he promised to go after my cow next day. 'But you yourself must go to school,' he said.
It was three days later before he found my cow. 'I saw vultures circling above Burqa country,' he told me. 'So I went there and found your cow. She had been killed by a lion. But do not weep my son: the lion has blessed her. He has put her forelegs side by side. He has put grass on top of them and he has spat on the grass. You shall get many cows from your cow-calf.'
And so it happened. My bull-calf died soon, but my cow-calf grew strong and healthy, and as soon as she had become a cow, she gave birth to a calf every year.

> Three years ago a fatal disease spread among the cattle of these parts. Many people tried to sell their cattle as soon as possible. They said to me: 'Sell your cow, my boy, while she is still healthy.' But I replied: 'If she has to die, let her die, but I will never sell her.' My cow did not even grow sick, and, while other people had no milk, I continued to drink the milk from my cow. These things happened I think, because the lion had blessed me, after he had eaten that cow's mother."

On the evening after the thanksgiving-ritual for his cow's seventh calf, the young owner paid me a visit. He told me:

> "After you had gone home, I asked my father again about my cow's mother who was killed by the lion. He told me exactly the same story he had told me ten years ago. Now I am sure that his first story was not invented in order to console me over the loss of my cow."

Shagerdi Bukko has this to say:

> "The *misensa* (the gada-set in power) always bought a bull for the lion. They would take him to the wilderness and tie him up there. After three or four days, they would go back to look if the lion had eaten their bull. If so, everything would be well in the country and the lion would not eat people."

At my question how they could know that it was the lion who had eaten their bull the answer was:

> "They know it for certain because the lion blesses the bull he eats. He puts the bull's forelegs side by side, puts some grass on top of them and spits on the grass. When the lion had done this, they knew that their butta (their eight years' period of rule) would be a good one."

3. Three rituals

a. Jari gatu

> "This we performed each year at the end of the rainy season. It was done so that the rats and weevils, the birds and wild animals

would be satisfied with little in our grain-stores and fields. As a child I enjoyed it very much. It was a feast for the whole neighbourhood: all women did it on the same day.

[To prevent the rats and weevils from being chased from their own grain-stores into the neighbours'.]

First my mother roasted barley, sorghum, and maize, and added to them black pepper, fragrant plants like *kefo* and *bakeri* (mint) and cooked *rafu* (a kind of cabbage). After this she ground all these things and put the food into a *tuwe* (big clay-pot). She had us, her children, carry the tuwe and a small knife that she needed. She herself took her prayerstick and a *tomborra* (a bundle of thin twigs neatly tied up, which serves as a torch). Some shorter extra-torches were divided among us children. Later we used a flashlight. I always liked very much to keep it. Together we went outside and in front of the house my mother took some handful of the food in the clay-pot and threw them towards our kitchen garden and our fields near to the house. Since we had also fields in Qabdo and Humbi (nearby areas), she threw some in those directions as well, saying: 'This is for Sakko (the area where they were living), this is for Qabdo, this is for Humbi.'
While throwing the food, she prayed:
'O Waqa, make the wild animals satisfied with little.'
And we answered: 'MAKE THEM SATISFIED WITH LITTLE.'
'Prevent the hail from harming our crops.'
'PREVENT IT.'
'Prevent the storm from harming our crops.'
'PREVENT IT.'
'Make all animals satisfied with little.'
'MAKE THEM SATISFIED WITH LITTLE.'

[Note the difference between the prayers against hail and storm on one hand and those against the animals on the other. Storm and hail must not come at all; the animals should come but only not eat too much.]

After this we went to our grain-stores. Here my mother put two heaps of food on the threshold of each grain-store, saying: 'This is for the rats and weevils. O Waqa, make them satisfied with little.'

[Giving and praying go together. Waqa's and the animals' blessing will not happen, unless man fulfills the saffu.]

Then we went back to our house, but, first, my mother cut some tchokorsa grass, divided it in two and put it at each side of our door. We did not enter the house.

From inside, my father called out to her: 'What did the *jari* say?'

At which my mother replied: 'Plenty has come, hunger has gone.'

After this we began to eat from the same food in the clay-pot. We went also to our neighbours to eat there, and our neighbours would come to eat with us. Everyone ate out of doors."

(Asafa Disasa)

Remark

The full meaning of the name *'jari gatu'* never became clear to me. *'Gatu'* means 'to throw' but the meaning of *'jari'* still eludes me. "It is an old Oromo word," some people say. Gammachu Magarsa gave the following explanation:

"The main idea is that we honour our fathers by doing so. It was they who first started cultivating the land; they left their vestiges in it and in this sense they are still in our land. By cultivating the land they also provided the insects, birds and animals with food they never had before, according to the saffu Waqa gave us. It is the latter aspect of their work that is expressed by this ritual: we too, we give to the insects, animals and birds a share in our harvest, that they may bless us."

b. A sacrifice for Abdari

In contrast to the former this is an exclusively men's ritual. People call it 'dibayu' which means 'libation, pouring out'.

Matcha have several such 'dibayu' the greatest of which is in thanksgiving for the harvest, which, again, is a men's ritual, performed beneath a tree on a hill. An animal is slaughtered and its blood is splashed on the ground in all directions, while beer and buna qala are poured out or put at the foot of the tree.

The ritual I will describe here ia s simplified *'dibayu'* on the occasion of the opening of a new plot of land.

Significantly, it was ten years before I was invited to participate in it and to add my blessing to their prayers.

When I arrived on the spot, the younger people were ploughing and clearing the land, a form of cooperation with detailed rules in regard to everybody's future share in the harvest.

[In spite of this rather practical aspect of their cooperation, one of my assis-

tants remarked: "When we cooperate in this way, it is not only people who cooperate: their ayana cooperate as well.]

These young people would not take part in the sacrificial rite proper.

[Here, too, is a characteristic feature of most Oromo rituals: the ritual proper is performed by a limited group, in this case a few older men, whose task it is by custom to perform it. But its importance in the people's eyes is not expressed by a large attendance on the part of those in whose name it is performed.]

At some distance from the workers three older men were ready to carry out the ritual. I knew them very well: one was our neighbour, another Asafa Disasa's father, and the third, the oldest and as such the leader, was a former slave, living not far from my home.

The sacrificial animal for Waqa was a pure black sheep. In general, however, the ritual was said to be for Abdari, the ayana of the new plot of land. Standing on the grass under two trees later to be felled, the three old men commenced their prayers. The first prayers were Christian prayers. They were said jointly, while the men kept their hands before their belly. Such joint prayers with the hands hanging are not specifically Oromo. Oromo prayers normally take the form of a dialogue between one of the ritual leaders and the group (though these leaders usually at a certain moment abandon set forms and start praying spontaneously, each one in his own way). In addition, the perfect attitude at prayer in the Oromo's eyes is to lift the hands towards heaven. These Christian prayers were: the 'Our Father', the Catholic 'Holy Mary', and three times 'Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'.

[I was assured that they would have said them even if I had not been present.]

After these Christian prayers their own traditional ones followed, prayers associated with this ritual from ancient times.

In turn one of the three men acted as a leader. (1, 2, 3, O = others)

1. O Waqa, you caused us to spend the night in peace, praise be to you.
O. PRAISE BE TO YOU.
1. You caused us to reach this day, praise be to you.
O. PRAISE BE TO YOU.
1. Continue, please.

2. O Waqa, you caused us to reach this day, praise be to you.
O. PRAISE BE TO YOU.
2. Give us also a peaceful day and, in the evening, receive our thanks.
O. RECEIVE OUR THANKS.

[It is a rule that prayers of praise and thanksgiving to Waqa are repeated several times. He is the highest one. Hence the first words of the next leader.]

3. Waqa's praise is double.
O Waqa, through your power cause the wild animals to be satisfied with little (on this our new plot of land).
O. CAUSE THEM TO BE SATISFIED WITH LITTLE.
3. Prevent them from eating too much.
O. PREVENT THEM.
3. What we have sown cause it to yield fruit ninefold.
O. CAUSE IT TO YIELD.
3. And after this we will say thanks to you.
O. WE WILL SAY THANKS.
1. If we have done wrong against them, make the animals again kindly disposed towards us.
O. MAKE THEM KINDLY DISPOSED.
1. Make them be satisfied with little.
O. MAKE THEM SATISFIED WITH LITTLE.
1. Make grow up what is young (children, calves, lambs, crops).
O. MAKE IT GROW UP.
1. Keep what is grown up alive.
O. KEEP IT ALIVE.
1. Give us the strength needed to work.
O. GIVE US STRENGTH.
1. O Abdari, o Waqa, o earth, make sprout what we have sown.
O. MAY IT SPROUT.
1. May what has sprouted grow.
O. MAY IT GROW.
1. May what has grown ripen.
O. MAY IT RIPEN.

After some further prayers in the same vein, the leaders of the co-operation brought the sheep (the members had bought it jointly) which was immediately slaughtered on the grass. The ritual leader collected the sheep's blood in his hands straight from the throat and sprinkled it around on the earth. By coming back hastily several times he collected

as much of it as possible. After this he went to a big tree, 'the tree of Abdari', and smeared the blood on its stem. This tree was the only one which would be left standing in view of future rituals for the ayana of the land.

During the slaughtering and sprinkling of the blood, the old man (1) prayed continually, prayers like the former ones and some new, such as:

1. O Abdari, have mercy on us.
O. HAVE MERCY.
1. Prevent us from wounding ourselves and others with our choppers.
O. PREVENT US.
1. Protect us from all evil.
O. PROTECT US.

From every part of the sheep (people say 'from nine parts') something was put aside on false-banana leaves for Waqa. Some fragrant twigs were added and the sacrifice was lit. When the flames went up, all retired a little 'that Waqa might come down and smell our meat'. Meanwhile similar prayers as before were said, but this time they were addressed exclusively to Waqa. After this, the ritual borde beer (made of the people's ancient grain, barley and *daguja*) was poured out under the tree by the leader.

In the afternoon, when the work was over, the rest of the sheep's meat was roasted ritually in long strips above a fire, and a goat was added in view of the many eaters.

The ritual had only once been interrupted to ask my blessing. I had given it in the same words people were using. During the whole of this ritual a baboon on look-out had been sitting in a tree some distance away, undisturbed by people, and looking at their activities, as a symbol of the saffu-covenant between man and the wild animals.

c. Yarabbi

The ritual is also called 'the *dibayu* of the women'. Under the lead of the *hadha tchatchu* – the woman who has the tchatchu, lit. the 'mother of the tchatchu' – all the women of a neighbourhood bring their offerings together under a big tree. Such a tree should be leafy and undamaged. It is often a sycamore. Such a ritual tree is called *dibayu* tree. Such dibayu trees are found everywhere in the country. No one ever 'wounds' such a tree by cutting even a single leaf from it.

Here is a description of the ritual by an old woman, as she gave it to Asafa Disasa.

[For completeness sake I have inserted a few details gathered from other informants.]

"On Yarabbi day we all went together to our dibayu tree, taking with us beer and buttermilk, many loaves of bread, and coffee and butter. Our mother of the tchatchu with *sarbofa* leaves (a creeper) around her head led the way. At a short distance from the tree all of us sat down on the grass in a circle, and we put everything we had brought with us in the centre. We had made our buttermilk tasty with fragrant *kefo* and *bakari* leaves, black pepper, and *rafu*, all things we had first ground.

While going to the tree and while sitting there we sang and prayed. In the meantime some of us started preparing buna qala. As soon as the buna qala had 'spoken' (exploded), each woman cut two little pieces from her bread and dipped them into the buttermilk, the hadha tchatchu doing so first. We also took some buna qala in our hands and some tchokorsa grass. In this way we approached the tree, one after another in single file following the lead of the hadha tchatchu. We first put our tchokorsa on the ground at the foot of the tree. On top of the tchokorsa we put the buna qala, and on top of this we poured out our beer. It was *borde*. While doing this all of us shouted 'Ililililil'.

We also prayed:

'O Waqa, make the animals and birds satisfied with little.
Make the weevils and the rats satisfied with little.
Make from year to year our granary yellow (full of golden grain).
Make grow up what is small.
Keep alive what is grown-up.
Protect our cattle from the evil eye.
Give us plenty.
Prevent the hail from harming us.
Prevent the storms from harming us.
Make all wild animals satisfied with little.
Make the animals of the road satisfied with little.
Make the animals who dwell in holes satisfied with little.
Make the animals in the fields satisfied with little.
Grant us our peace.'

After this we put many loaves of bread (round loaves, 20 x 5 cm) at the far side of the tree on leaves which the boys had put

there for us. And we poured our buttermilk on the breads. In the meantime all those boys stood waiting at some distance. For the moment, they were not allowed to touch the loaves.
After this we went back to our place. While coming we had passed by the tree on the right side, now we came back on its left side. We returned praying as we walked and not looking back.
As soon as we had reached our place, the hadha tchatchu shouted to the boys: '*Ofkalla* – Go your way!'
Upon which all of them ran towards the loaves. Each took as many loaves as he was able to carry. They ran away with them and each had to eat them alone without sharing any with others.

[They represent the wild animals and therefore are forbidden to behave like people.]

As for us, we did not sit down again. Our hadha tchatchu turned to the men and other boys and girls who had been waiting not far from our place, and told them: 'Now you must stay here and finish all food and drink that is left on the spot. And so they did. As for us, we went home praying and singing without looking back.
Only a few newly married women from among us would stay behind to dance with the boys and girls (their former hiriya) after eating.
While going home we sang:

Yá Marám sugéko	O Maram, blessed one,
mádhin wáraná súga róbe.	the meal for these people has been blessed: it is plenty.

O my son, how good all these things were! On such a day, we felt Waqa very near to us! O, if time would permit, how I would like to do these things again!

[Time, in the Matcha's eyes, is a power. It imposes itself on people as seasons do. Man has to adapt to it. The old woman refers to social change and particularly to Christianity.]

4. A myth

All these customs, rites, and attitudes, are given a charter in a well-known myth. The narrator is Waquma Tollera.

"In the beginning, Waqa summoned all his creatures. 'Come,' he said, 'I am going to give each of you his share in the many good things I have created.'

All the animals and birds came, and Waqa began to give them each his share. To the birds he gave the barley and sorghum, to the baboons the maize, to the lion the cattle, to the leopard sheep and goats, to the hyenas those animals which had not cloven-hoofs (horses, mules, donkeys).

Man did not arrive until the distribution was finished. 'O Waqa, I am too late,' he said, 'is there nothing left for me?' – 'Only the water is left,' Waqa said, 'so, you man, take the water.'

All animals began to eat the things Waqa had assigned to them. The lion ate a cow and grew thirsty. So he went to man and asked him: 'Please, give me from your water.' But man refused. The lion kept on pleading. Man continued to refuse. In the end the lion said: 'O man, I am dying from thirst. Please, give me water, and I'll give you all my cattle.' To this man agreed. The lion drank, but before going he said to man: 'Now I have given you all my cattle, but do not forget that they were originally my share, given to me by Waqa. On occasion I shall continue to take a cow or a bull from you.' And to this, too, man agreed.

After the lion the leopard came. He had eaten a goat and he, too, was thirsty. He asked for water, but man refused. And, in the end, the leopard, too, had to give man all his sheep and goats for the sake of water. But, before going away he, too, said to man: 'Be sure that I'll come back from time to time to take something of the share that Waqa gave me.'

The baboons came, the hyenas came, the birds came. All gave to man everything they had and man gave them water. They could not do otherwise. Every creature that eats needs water; it needs to drink.

However, it is still the birds' ayana that they like our grain, and the lion's ayana that he likes our cattle. Waqa himself has made them this way.

So it is that we say to the birds and animals when they come into our fields: 'May Waqa who gave you this from the very beginning make you satisfied with little.'

Thus it is that Waqa will not bless us, if we refuse to give to them."

Other versions of this myth are widespread both among Oromo and other peoples.

The Oromo, in making the myth their own, have associated it with their concepts of *saffu* and *ayana.*

Chapter 29

THE MATCHA'S SELECTIVE ATTITUDE IN REGARD TO BIBLICAL MYTHS

When their traditional way of life was shaken by a thorough socio-religious change, Matcha did not undergo Christianity as a mere threat to their most cherished values: they also sought and found in it a support for these same values against the impact of social change.

In much of the Christian message they recognized their own concept of Waqa; their feelings of dependence on him, their idea about peace among people being a condition for Waqa's blessing.

In the holy book of the Christians, and particularly in the life of the Jewish patriarches, the laws of Moses, the lives and activities of the early judges and kings, they saw their own ancient way of life reflected. It provided them with arguments against the attitude of those non-Oromo Christians who condemned indiscriminately all their traditional rituals as the devil's work. It is this attitude of an indiscriminate condemnation that chiefly accounts for the present confusion in the field of religion.

It is possible to say that people are still in a process of selecting those Christian elements that can merge with their traditional way of life and thought. In the words of a young educated man:

> "I still feel myself to be an Oromo to the backbone and, on the other hand there are things in Christianity that genuinely appeal to me. Other things, however, I do not like, especially when it condemns so many things our ancestors treasured. I still have a feeling that I cannot become a true Christian without ceasing to be an Oromo. So I feel myself in between."

1. The story of Abraham and Isaac

We know that the borana among the Matcha did not eat sheep. A traditional explanation of this custom was that the borana are people of peace and that the sheep, too, is an animal of peace. But nowadays, another explanation may be offered, namely that they abstained from eating sheep because Abraham, who was the first borana, ceased to do so after Waqa had given him a sheep to be killed instead of his son.

Three things foster their view of Abraham as their first ancestor:

a) The great similarity between the Oromo way of life and that of the early patriarchs.

b) The passages in the bible which speak of descendants of Abraham who were not admitted to the covenant with God, but not entirely excluded from Waqa's blessing, namely Abraham's son Ismael and his grandson Esau. (On occasion they will enforce their argument by pointing at the name of one of Esau's descendants, 'Orma'.)
c) The Matcha's lack of a myth of their own to support the borana custom.

It brings them to explaining their becoming Christians by the very fact that Abraham, too, believed in God's promises about a Saviour of all peoples who would be born from his seed.

So we find a new myth of descent in which their first ancestor Raya becomes a descendant of Abraham.[37] At the same time they enrich the venerable biblical story with elements of their own way of life. Here follows a Matcha version of it. It was told to my assistant Asafa Disasa by his uncle Ambassa Waqo, a borana and now a Christian.

> "Waqa liked Abraham. Abraham was old and Waqa had given him only one son (by his first wife). Waqa said to Abraham: 'If you are really a good servant of mine, you must kill your son for me.' Satan said to Waqa: 'Abraham will not do this for you.' But Waqa said again to Abraham: 'Kill your son for me.'
> Abraham told his wife: 'Waqa has asked me to kill our son for him. Can I do such a thing?' Sara said: 'Yes, in this case you should kill him.'
> Abraham was a borana, our borana. So he took his knife and went up the mountain. His son asked him: 'Father, we are going up the mountain now, but we have no bull or sheep to kill. You have a knife and fire, but what about the animal we are to kill there?' Abraham replied: 'Waqa knows, my son.'
> After some time his son said to him: 'My father, perhaps you are going to kill me. If so, you must tie my feet and hands, lest I kick you with my feet and beat you with my hands. And also: when you are about to kill me, do not look at my face, lest you would say: 'He is my son: I cannot kill him.' So, when you are about to cut my throat, keep my face downwards. If you do not kill me, you would forsake what you were taught by our fathers.' When he was about to kill his son, Abraham said: 'In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit', but at

[37] In the same way the Somali trace their descent from the prophet.

that very moment a voice was heard calling: 'Abraham, Abraham, Abraham, do not kill your son. Kill this.' And at that moment Waqa gave him a ram. This ram was white and his tail was very fat. Abraham killed that ram. 'This ram', he said, 'came down from heaven to replace my son. Therefore, I shall never again eat sheep.'
From that day onwards the borana gave up eating sheep."

It strikes the eye that in this Christian Oromo version the relationship between husband and wife, father and son has greater justice done to it than is the case in the bible story.

Satan who appears on the scene at the beginning reminds us of the story of Job where again satan challenged God in regard to Job's virtue. It is a story which appeals strongly to the Oromo.

The words "In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit' reflect the Christians' custom when killing; it is a counterpart of the Muslims' "In the name of Allah" and in both religions it is based on the belief that God is ultimately the sole master of life. The insertion of this passage shows how much Matcha identify Abraham with Christianity.

"The sheep was white" ... This is pure white. Under Christian influence pure white has come to be regarded somewhat more as a colour suited to Waqa. Though we should note Gammachu Magarsa's comment on this passage: "The Oromo's feeling in regard to pure white is still that it refers first of all to the inner Waqa, as when we say: 'Waqa is dark but inside he is white like hail'." As we saw in the previous chapter, pure black still prevails in purely Oromo rituals. In the church people commonly prefer to offer a pure white sheep, but they are conscious that this constitutes a shift in the direction of Christianity. "Nowadays, when we give a white sheep to Waqa in the church, people say: 'Waqa likes a white sheep'." (Asafa Disasa)

"The sheep's tail was very fat" ... A fat tail is the first thing people look at when buying a sheep for slaughtering.

2. Other biblical myths

Not all the stories in the bible appeal to the Matcha as strongly as the story of Abraham and Isaac. It depends whether they find in them a validation of their own traditional ways of life and thought.

So it is that the biblical stories about the creation of the world before the appearance of man are not greatly regarded. The Matcha's in-

terest is focused on man and his relations with the world, not on this world in itself. In their own myths, too, no evidence is found for the creation of the world and so we do not find with them impressive creation myths as there are to be found with the Jews and a number of other peoples.

On the other hand, the story of man's first ancestors in paradise and their first sin, which is an echo of their own traditions about the sins of their first ancestors (but about which they had no actual mythical story of their own), is related time and again when they are speaking of their present situation. In gatherings, they tend, again and again, to explain the abuses and problems of their present condition by reference to the sins of the first men. In this they reveal their tendency to mythical patterns of thought which cause them to go back quite naturally to the first origin of things.

CONCLUSION

In this book I have allowed the Matcha Oromo to present themselves to the reader in their own words as much as possible. Their own account is more valuable than any number of learned speculations on a westerner's part.

Only to a limited extent can a westerner help them to articulate their own culture; ultimately they will have to do this themselves. So I hope that in the near future Oromo scholars will be found to continue the work initiated by this book.

Once they had given me their confidence, it was natural to them to tell me first of all about their religious view of man and his world, their moral norms and the values to which they are most attached. It is these things which constitute their most precious heritage and their identity as a people, and in this they can most enrich other peoples. It is therefore that they deserve this book to be dedicated to them and especially to those among them who actually contributed to it.

One day, after I had expressed to one of my assistants my appreciation for his help, he replied:

> "My people gave me my language, my culture, my very life. They sent me to school. What can I give back? I cannot give money to all of them. So I give them my work with you.
> Ultimately, however, this work of mine is not my own. It is Waqa who brought me into contact with you, a priest with whom I could discuss our Oromo religion on equal terms. By following the way Waqa has led me, I have brought honour to him."

Some days later he handed me a paper. "This paper," he said, "is for the end of your book. Did you not publish once the prayers we say at the end of a day of communal work in the fields, and was this work of ours not a communal work as well? So I would like us to conclude this book in true Oromo fashion. I made a prayer in the name of all Oromo who cooperated with you, and whose words are to be found in this book. Here it is:

Ya Waq hundaf angaffu	O Waqa who exists before all things
arartike hundumarra tchala.	your magnanimity surpasses all.
Galannike saffu.	We praise you by abiding by your saffu

Dubbin tchafte kana ulfinake hamull'isu;	May the words of this book show your greatness;
ararake maatcha lafaa hundumatti haipsu.	may they show the light of your magnanimity to all the peoples of this earth.
Hoji kana nagaan nu jalqabsifte,	You made us start this work in peace,
nagaan nu fitchisifte:	you made us complete it in peace:
galanni si hagau.	praise be to you.

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OROMO WORDS

abba	father, owner, leader, dispenser, guardian
ayana	Waqa's creative activity in any creature or group of creatures making them the way they are, assigning to them their place in this world and their relationship to others. 'Something of Waqa' or 'Waqa in a particular way'. The invisible part of man, his personality, good luck
balballa	door, a set of nine generations
borana	people who are considered as being of pure Oromo descent; the highest socio-religious stratum of Matcha society
budda	a person with 'the evil eye'
buna qala	'slaughtered coffee', coffeefruits stewed in butter; one of the most important ritual symbols
buqe	big pumpkin, a symbol of female fertility
butta	one of the most important gada-rituals of the luba, the gada-group in power, consisting in the slaughtering of a bull by each member of the group
daumsa	birthgiving
dagale	horizontal stems, used to reinforce the walls of a house
dhaabaa	ritual food and drink put apart in most rituals
dhaabbata	ritual stick of a married man
dibayu	ritual libation
ebbicha	small tree whose bitter leaves are used for ritual cleaning, especially of containers, and whose fragrant blossoms symbolize the effect of this cleaning
faqi	tanner
finchaan	urine, sperm
fudha	marriage of the man
gabaro	second social stratum of Matcha society, those who cannot pride themselves of pure Oromo descent
gada	socio-religious organization, ideally comprising the whole of Matcha society, in which people pass

	through several grades of social adulthood. Each grade comprises eight years
gada-group	one of the five groups who, each in turn, takes over for eight years the responsability for their people's well-being
gadamoji	people whose sons have reached their ruling-period
gadidu	human shadow, ritual impurity
gadisa	any other shadow
gerarsa	a song about one's own experiences (f. e. poverty, imprisonment) or exploits (f. e. a killer's song of triumph)
gula	a man who ended his ruling-period eight years or more ago (ideally 56–80 years of age)
gultu	a gula's sister
gumi	meeting for deliberations or for certain ritual purposes such as purification after incest or peacemaking (to be distinguished as such from a tchida)
hadha	mother, owner, leader, dispenser, guardian
hala	communal taboo as a result of ritual impurity, either or not caused by a-social behaviour
halu	individual taboo as a result of ritual impurity, either or not caused by a-social behaviour
harama	something to be avoided on moral grounds
herumma	marriage of the woman
hidda	root, vein
hiddi	bush with round yellow fruit, a solanum variety; an important ritual symbol
horra	source of mineral water. The water is not only drunk by people and cattle for the sake of good health but plays also an important part in rituals
kallacha	important ritual object (iron) used to curse
kumbi	myrrh
lafto	umbrella acacia
luba	service, a man in his ruling-period according to the gada-system, any man who has performed his butta-ritual
lubabaesa	a man during the first eight years after his luba-ship
lubabaeti	a lubabaesa's wife

lubabasu	the freeing of a slave
maracha	a creeper with soft leaves; an important ritual symbol
muda	anointment
naga	peace with Waqa and man, and all the blessings resulting from this, such as fertility, wealth, good health, honour
ooda	a sycamore chosen for the performance of rituals, a symbol of Waqa's presence among men and as such also called 'muka Waqaa = the tree of Waqa'
qallicha	ritual expert of a rather a-social type
qallu	ritual expert
qaraba	little knife, used for shaving and circumcision
qiltu	general name for any sycamore (fig-tree)
qulqullu	pure, clean, both in a physical and moral sense
qupha	a weak or retarded animal, or a female past bearing; a sacrificial animal, wholly or partly cut in two halves in rituals of peacemaking after manslaughter
qomo	clan
raaba	all people who did not yet reach their ruling-period in the gada-system
sa'a	cow, cattle in general
sa'a dabbachu	ritual of thanksgiving after the birth of a calf
saffu	the mutual relationship (rights and duties) between individual creatures or groups of creatures according to their place in the cosmic and social order on the basis of their ayana
sanyo	people who have regular sexual intercourse outside marriage
sera	law
shamma (Amh.)	wide white shawl; Ethiopian national dress
shammane	weaver
siqe	ritual stick of a married woman
tchatchu	ritual object of the women; a symbol of blessing
tchida	feastive ritual with communal meal

tchokorsa	a grass; symbol of fertility, survival and peace
tumtu	blacksmith, weaver
ulma	period of ritual seclusion
ulmaya	a small tree, used in rituals as a symbol of purity
wachiti	clay-pot for preparing buna qala; symbol of cohesion between members of the same balballa or lineage
warabesa	hyena
warra supe	potters
warsa	term used to indicate the relationship between a wife and her husband's brother; both of them are warsa to one another
yai	meeting, especially for the purpose of peacemaking
yarabbi	dibayu (libation) ritual for women, preferably performed under a sycamore

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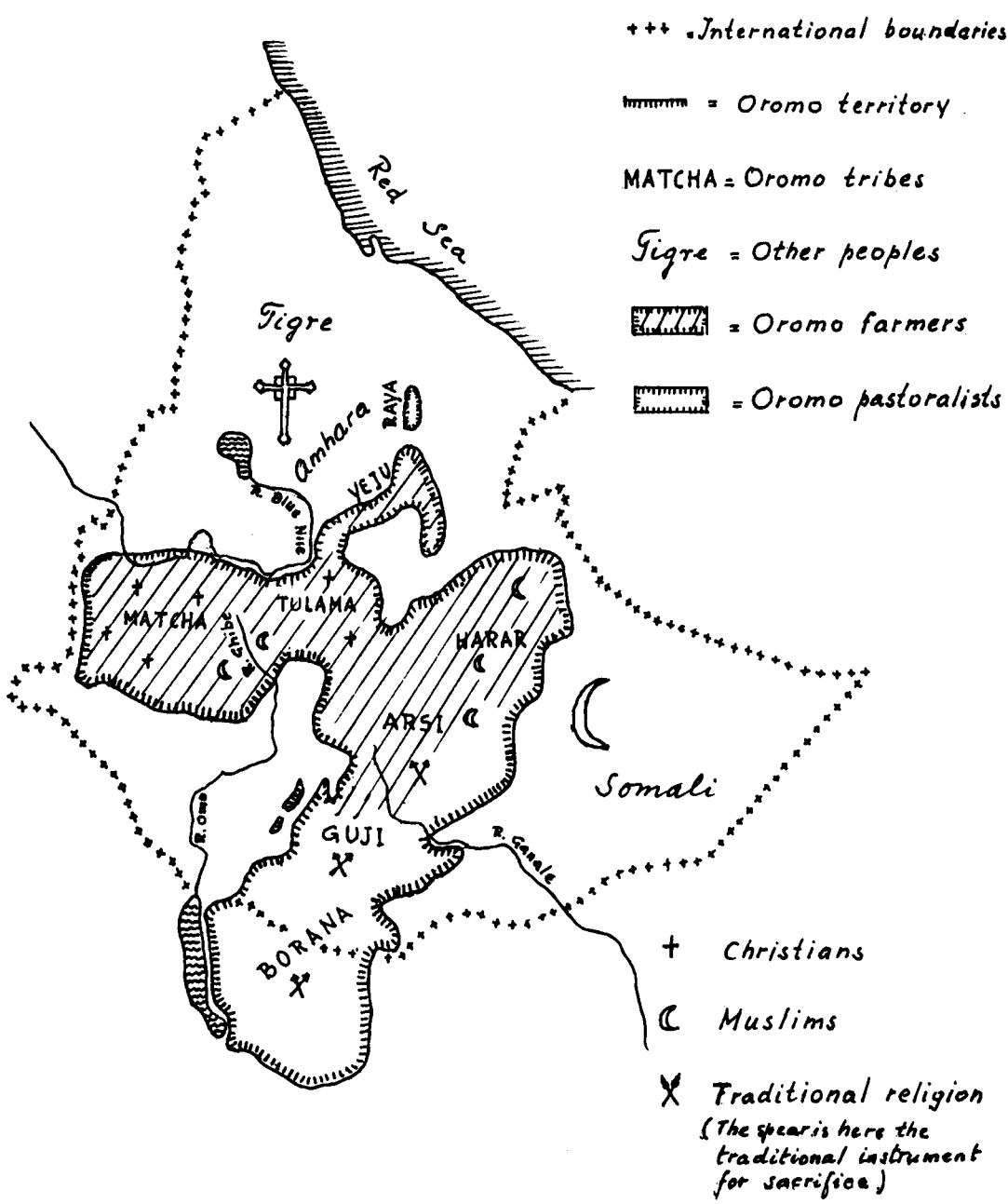
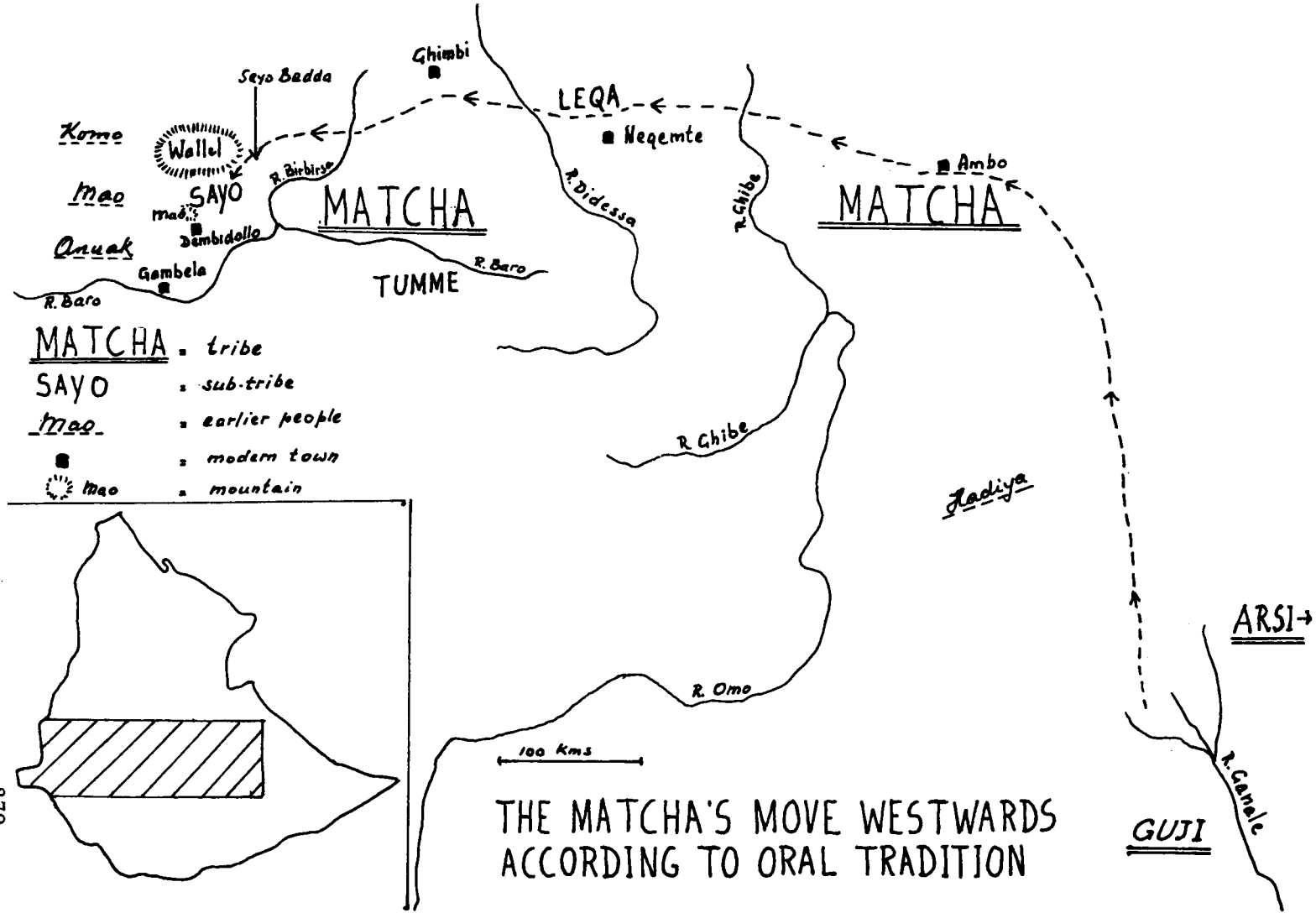
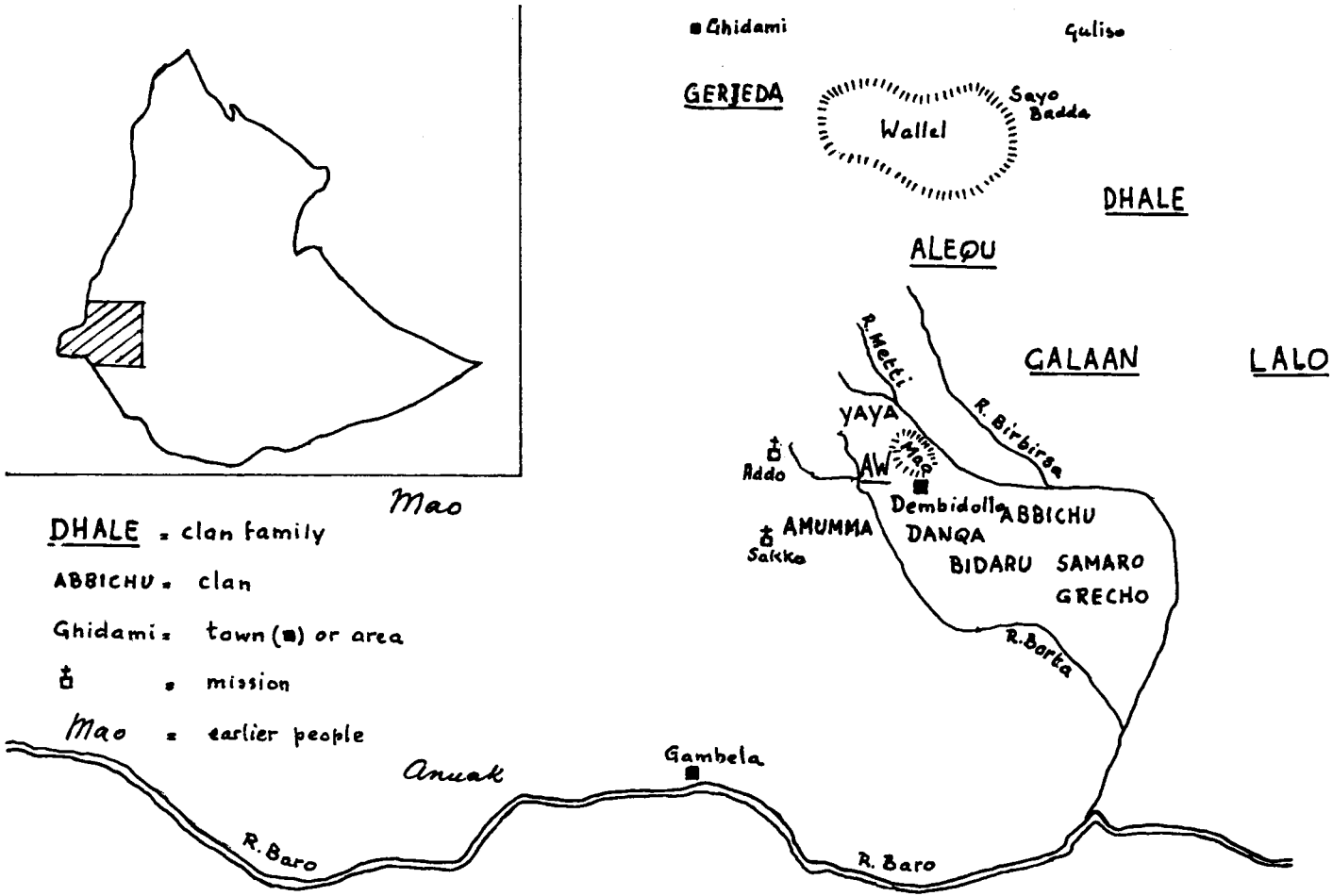


THE OROMO OF ETHIOPIA


Ghimbi
Seyo Badda
LEQA
Nekemte
Ambo
Kome
Wallel
R. Birbirsa
MATCHA
R. Didessa
R. Ghibe
MATCHA
Mao
SAYO
mad.
Dembidolle
Anuak
Gambela
R. Baro
R. Baro
TUMME
MATCHA = tribe
SAYO = sub-tribe
Mao = earlier people
= modern town
Mao = mountain
R. Ghibe
Hadiya
ARSI
R. Omo
100 Kms
R. Ganale
GUJI
THE MATCHA'S MOVE WESTWARDS
ACCORDING TO ORAL TRADITION



THE MOST IMPORTANT DESCENT GROUPS

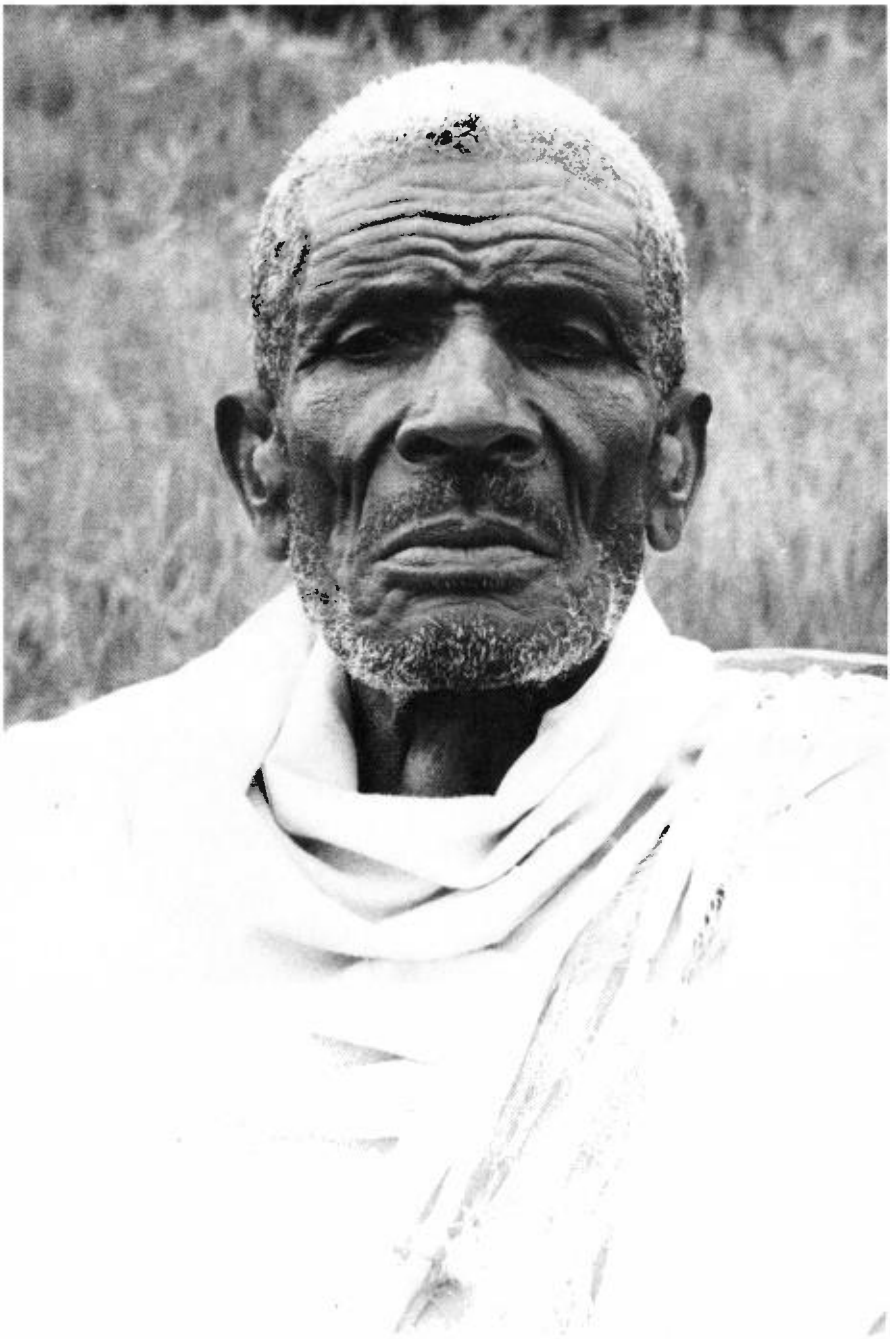
1. Assistant Asafa Disasa with his wife and children.

2. Asafa Disasa's parents.

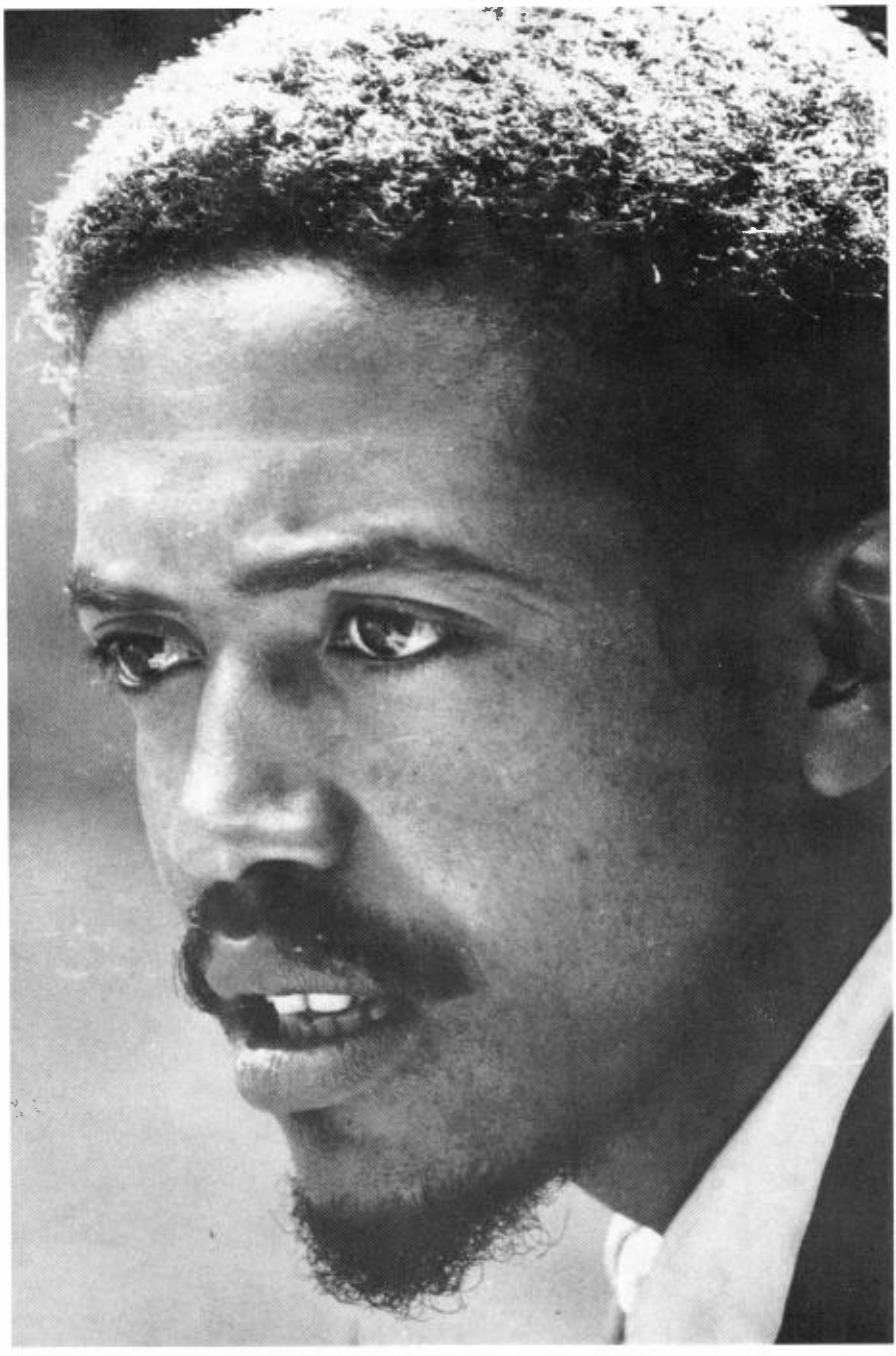
3. Assistant Ensermu Waquma with his family. From right to left: his parents, his little son, his sister and his wife.

4. Assistant Beqele Lamu with his wife and their little son.

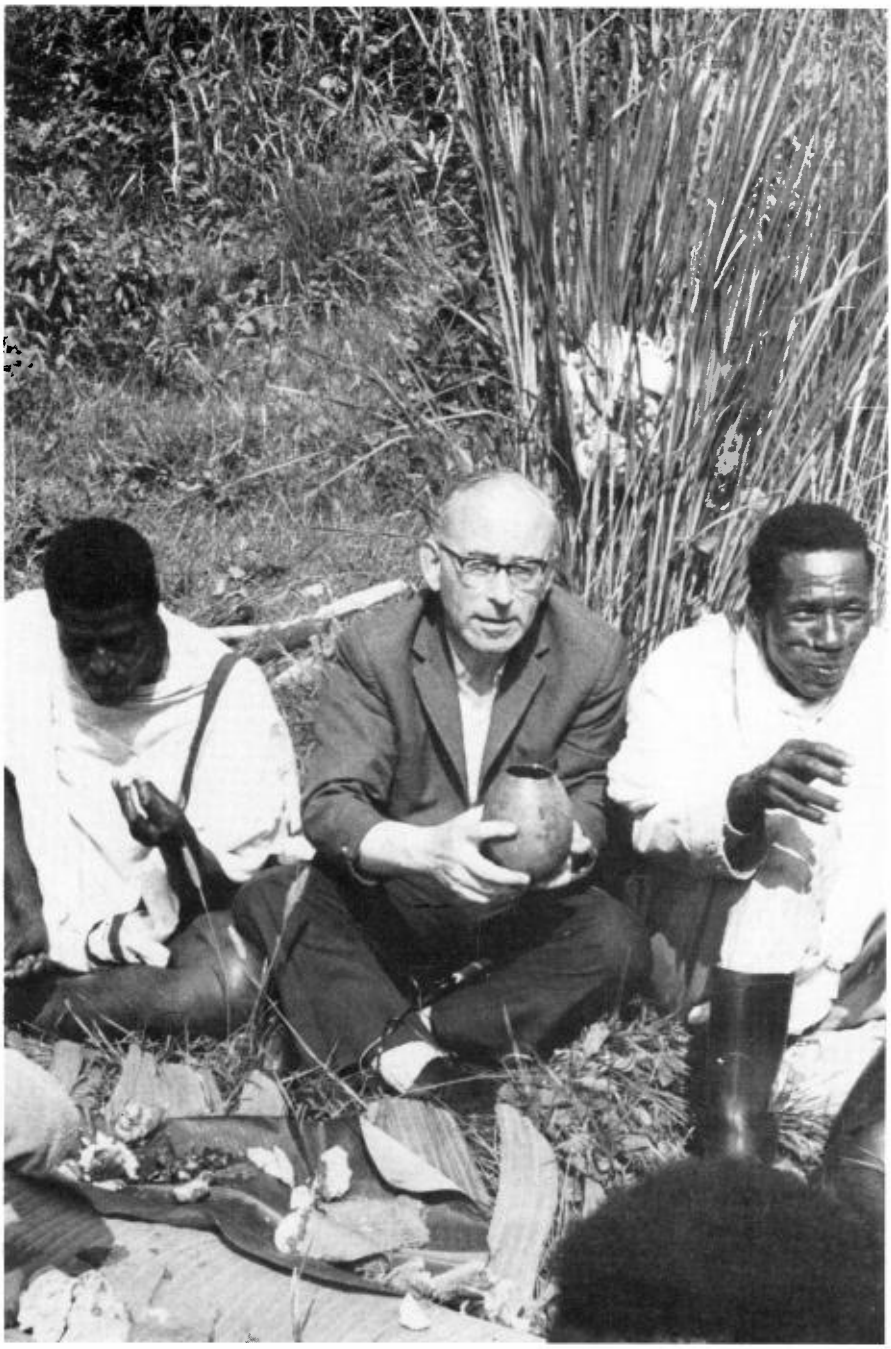
5. Assistant Mirresa Gamtesa with his wife.



6. Shagerdi Bukko, one of my best informants. He was known as a ritual expert throughout the Dembidollo area.



7. Assistant Gammachu Magarsa, grandson of the last *abba bokku* (holder of the scepter) in the Dembidollo area.



8. The author drinking beer at a ritual meal. The ritual 'plates' (those of the Matcha's ancestors) are false-banana leaves.

9. Ploughing.

10. Harvest time has come. Children sitting in the ripe tjef.

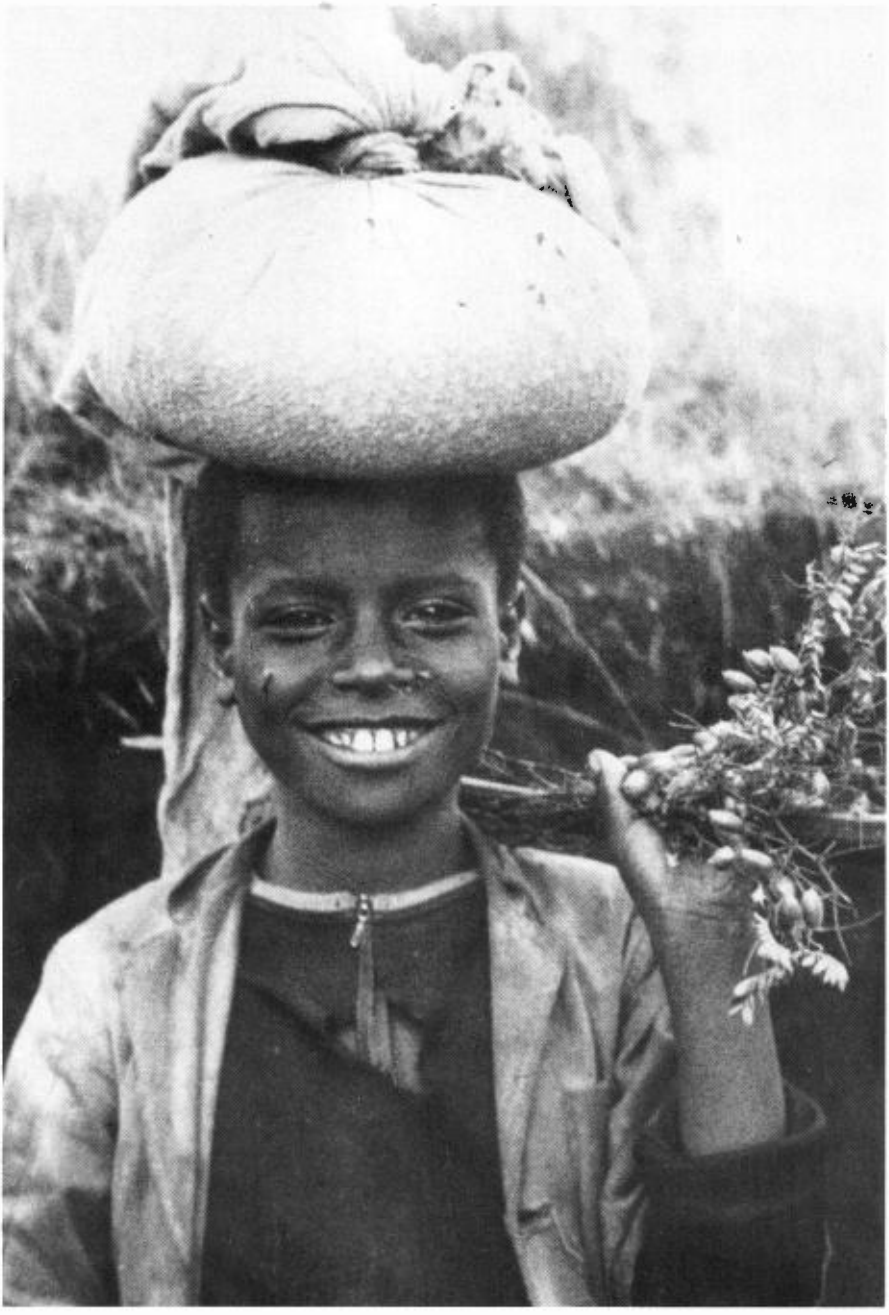
11. The tjef ears are brought to the threshing floor.

12. The cattle are driven over the tjef at threshing.

13. After threshing the workers dance in the grain. The day of communal work is concluded with a beer-party, singing and prayers of thanksgiving.

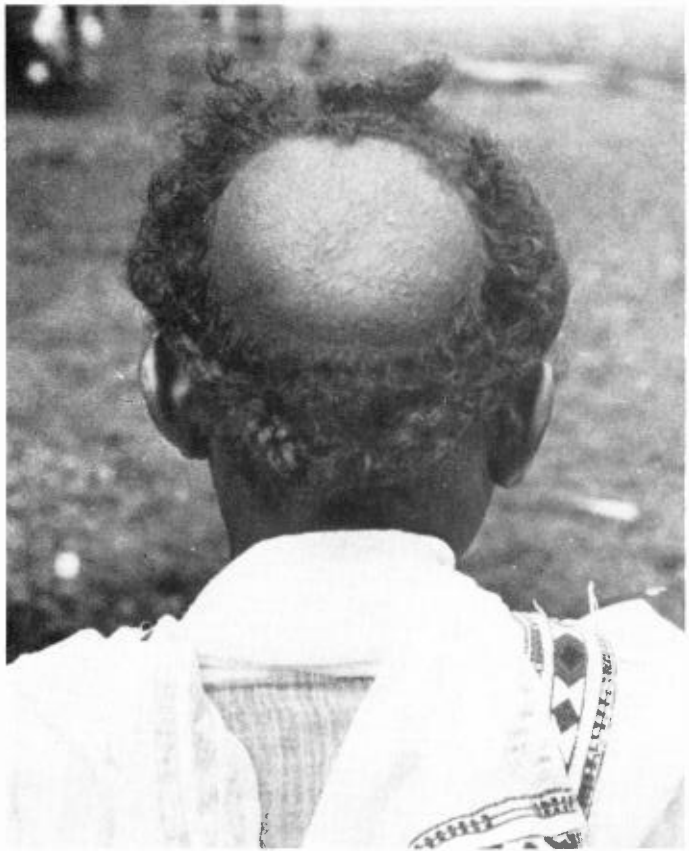
14. Young Matcha couple. In the background the little grain-stores.

15. The old way of grinding the grain between stones is heavy work. It is the task of women and girls. The little boy has a *rogge* hairstyle.



16. Nowadays the grain is usually ground in a mill. This boy comes back from the mill; on his head the ground grain, in his hand *shumbura* peas which he eats on the way.

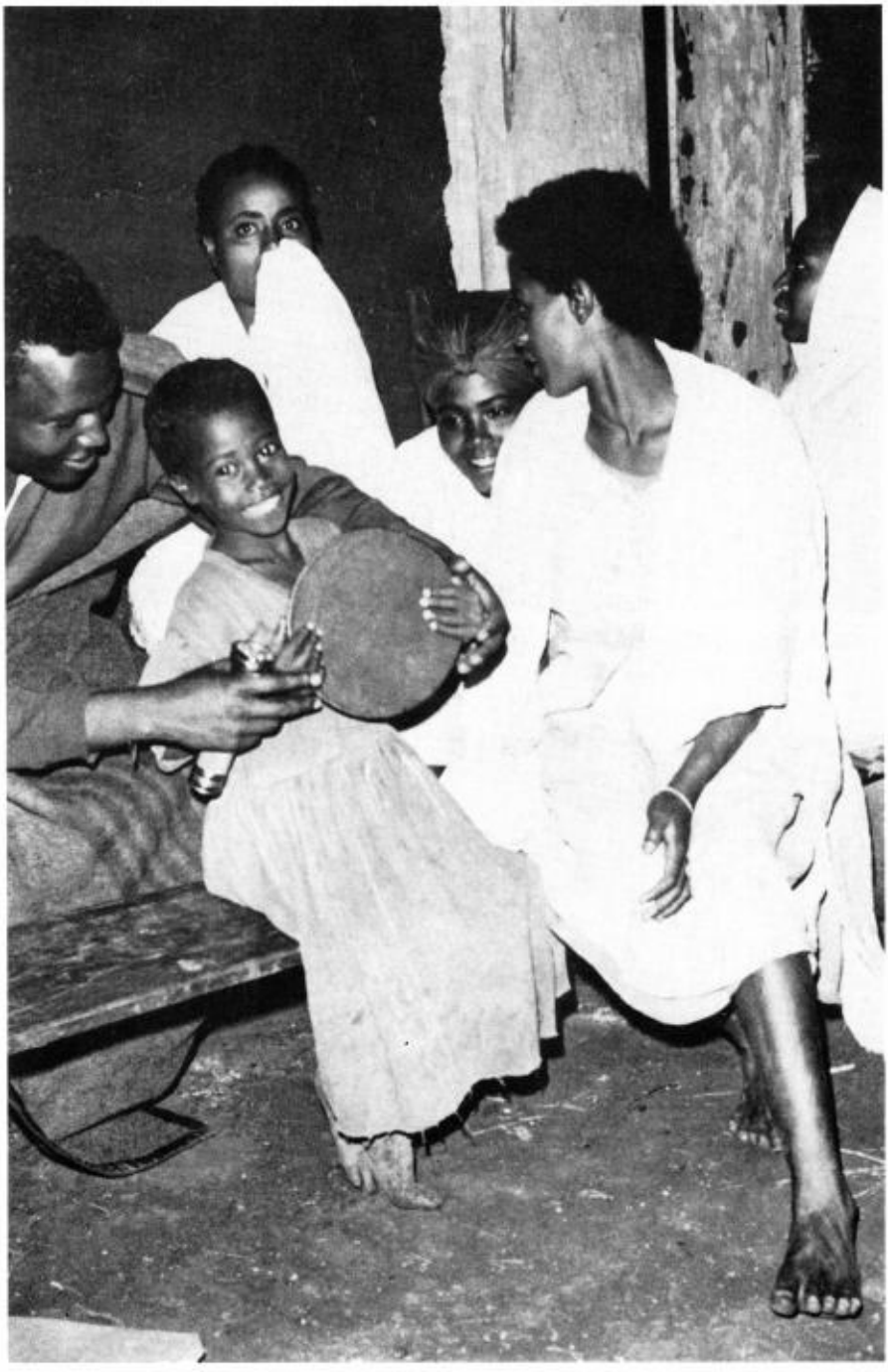
17a + b. Fetching water from the nearby river.



18a + b. A Matcha girl with her maiden-tonsure.

19. Like water, firewood too belongs to the kitchen. Hence collecting it is the work of women and girls.

20. Beqele Lamu – still a boy at that time – with the fragrant blossoms of the *ebbicha* tree. The bitter leaves are used to clean whatever is ritually impure.

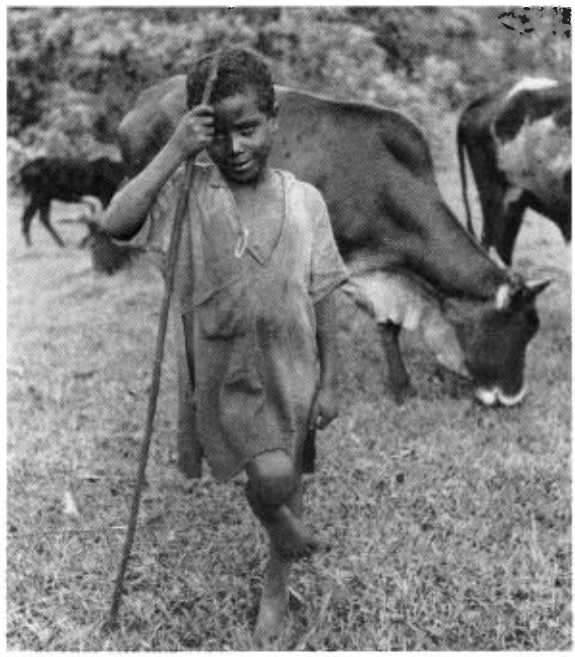


21. Play the **drum, my little girl.**

22. Girls singing insult-songs, addressed to the groom at a wedding party.

23. Girls weeding. They like to sing during the work.

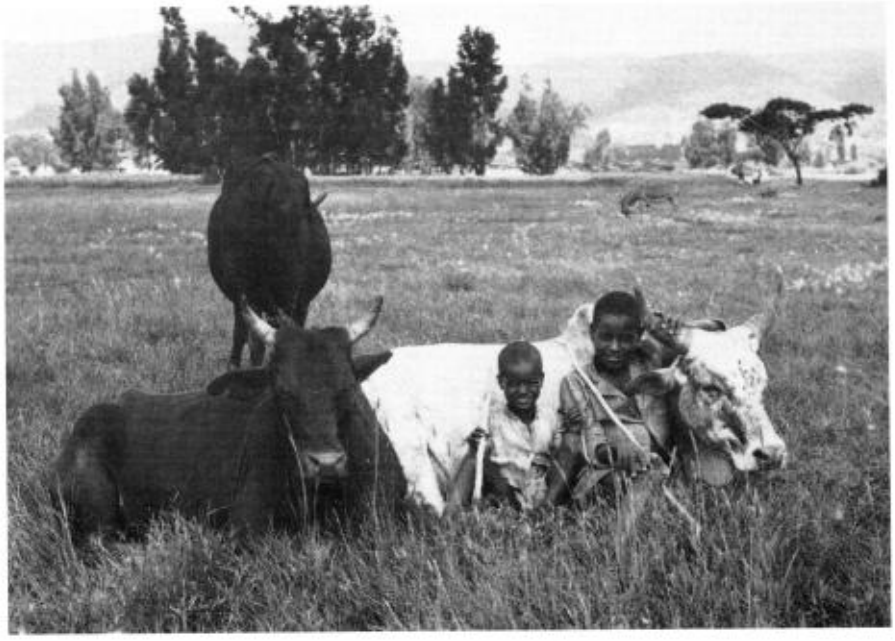
24. A mother with her little son.



25.
Young herdsman with his cattle. Despite the fact that cattle-holding is decreasing in Matchaland in favour of agriculture, Matcha are still to a great extent pastoralists in their hearts. Having some heads of cattle is a source of deep satisfaction ... and of prestige.

26. The poorer people have only a few sheep nowadays. In Matcha rituals the sheep plays an important part as 'an animal of peace'.

27. A typical scene in western Matchaland.



28. Herding cattle is one of the things young boys like most.

29. Matcha horseman. For centuries Oromo horsemen have played a prominent part in their country's history.

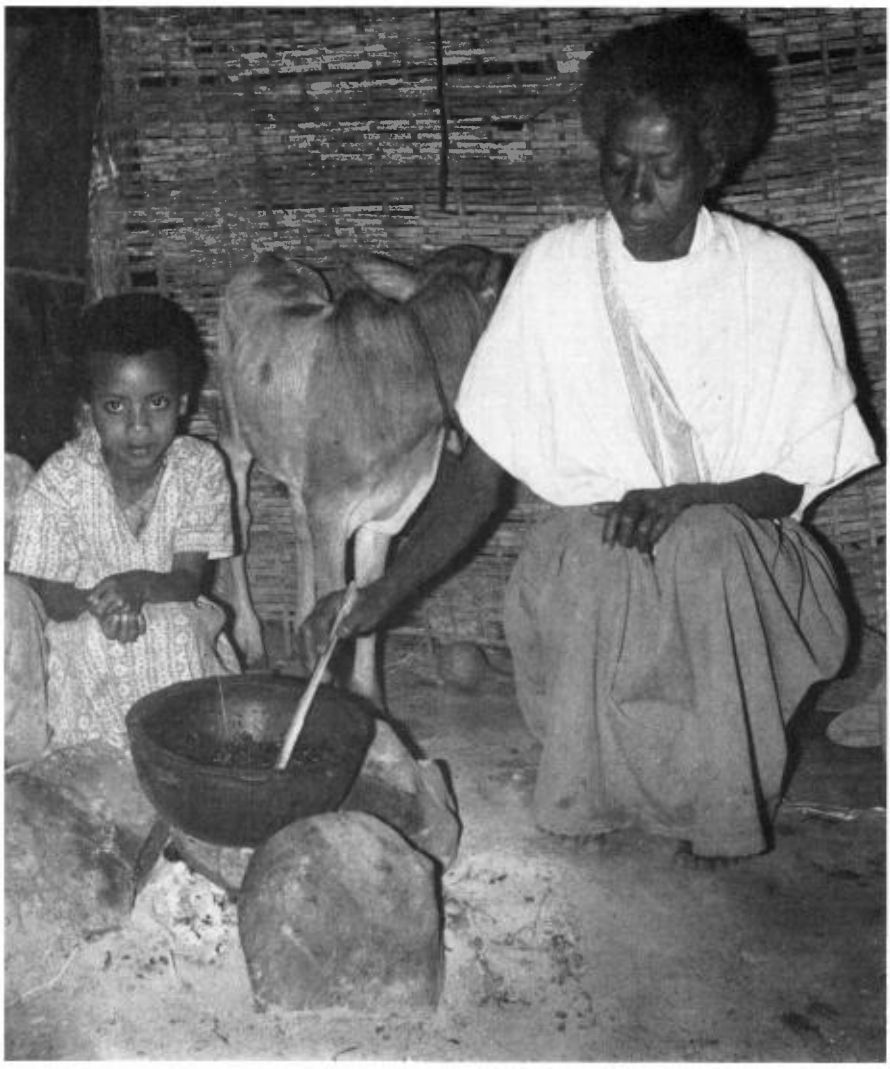
30. Matcha men dancing on the occasion of a church-feast. The movement is always anti-clockwise, which means starting from the right i.e. 'from the better side'.

31. A blacksmith with his bellows.

32. A weaver's daughter spinning cotton-thread.

33. A birth-ritual. Women of the neighbourhood singing birth-songs in the house where the child was born. While singing they beat a cow-hide. Ideally it should be the skin of a fertile cow.

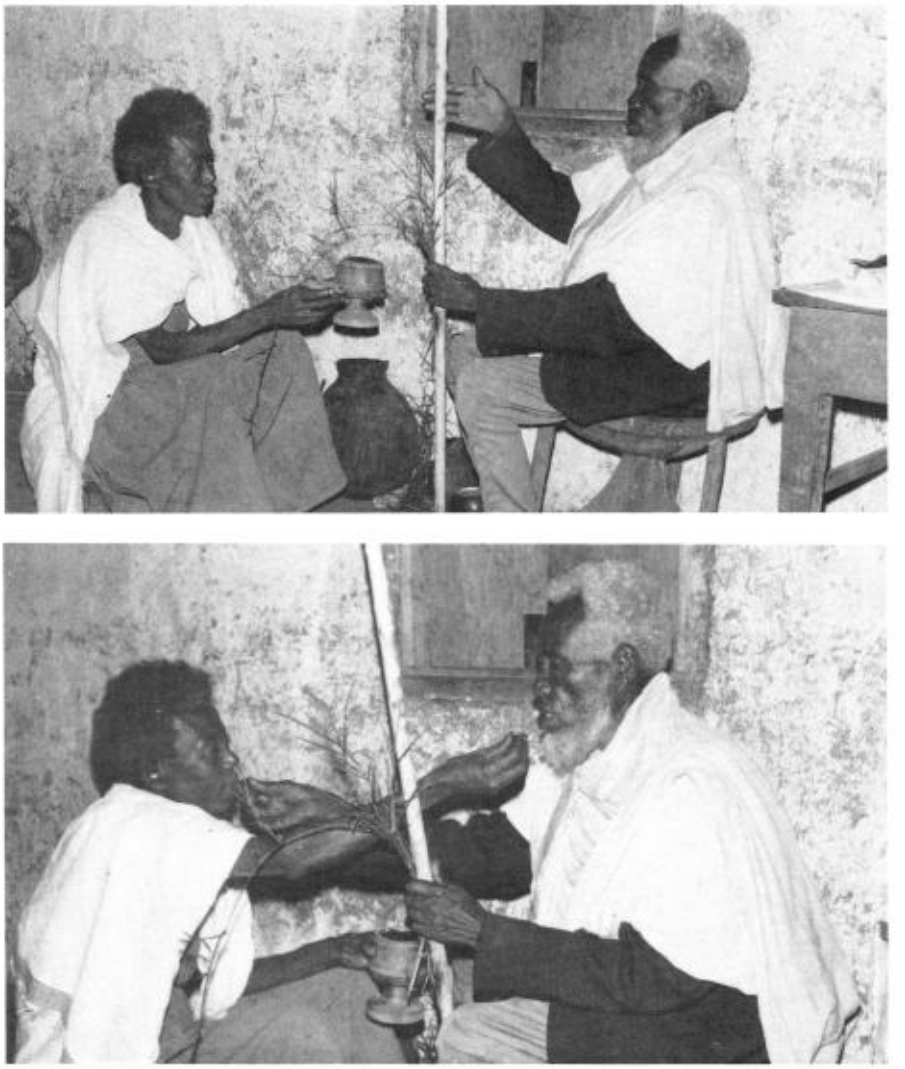
34. After singing, the 'porridge of childbirth' is distributed on false-banana leaves.



35. Preparing *buna qala*, coffee-fruits stewed in butter.

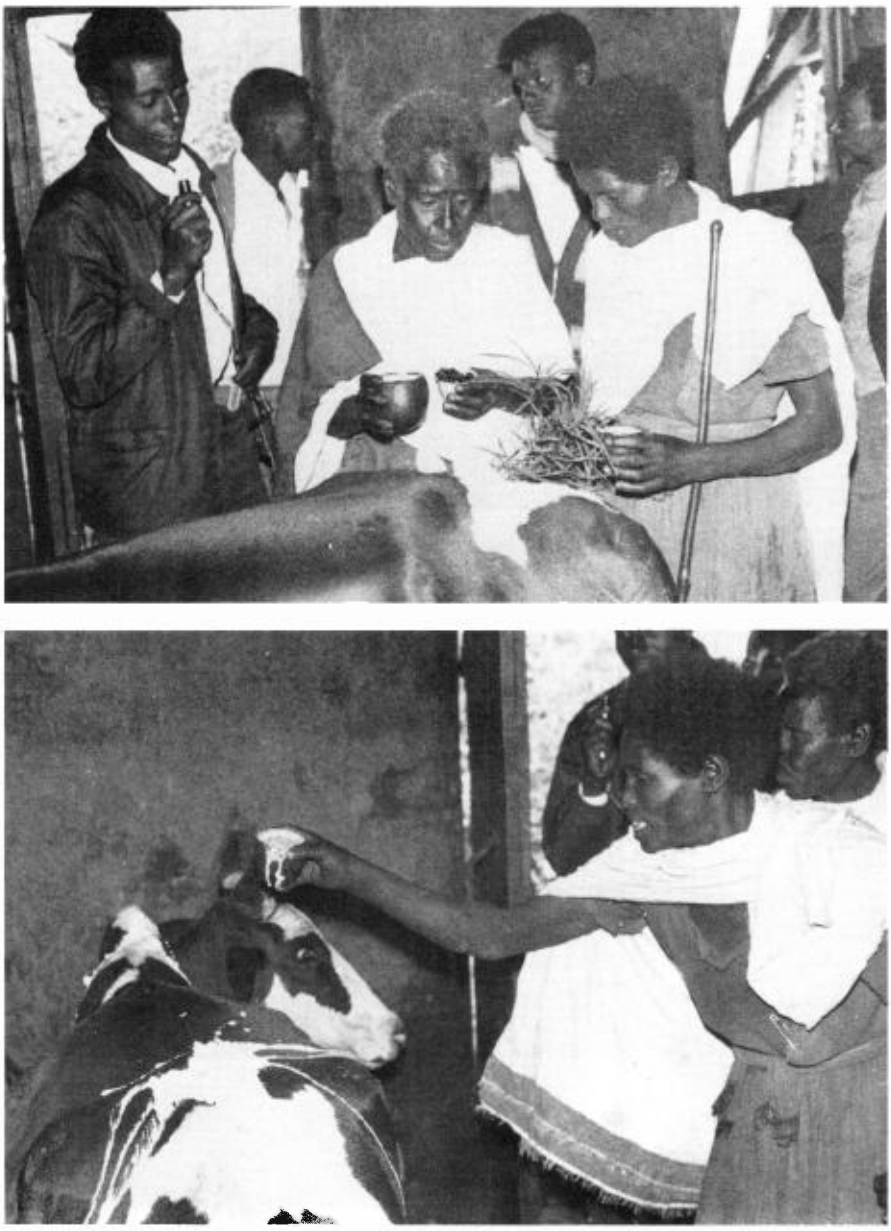
36a + b.

In former times, every father of a family had a ritual stick, made of strong and fragrant wood – a stick he received from his father on his wedding-day as a symbol of the new branch he was going to form on the genealogical tree. It was a symbol of its owner. This ritual stick was periodically anointed with butter saturated with coffee (buna qala). Here Waquma Tollera and his wife re-enact this ritual. The stick is anointed going upwards from the bottom to the top 'that their life may go upwards'. The grass they keep in their hands is



36a+b.

tchokorsa, a symbol of life, fertility and peace. The wife holds the little container with buna qala, also a symbol of fertility. Against the wall the *'dhaaba'* are visible, a big and a small jar with ritual beer ('mother and child') and a small calabash with milk. After the anointing husband and wife put some buna qala in one another's mouth that Waqa (God/sky) may give them offspring in children and grandchildren. Finally they offer one another some of the beer and milk of the dhaaba, both of them equally symbols of fertility.



37. A ritual of thanksgiving after the birth of a calf. The mother-cow is anointed with milk and buna qala 'that she may calve again'. The old woman holds the milk and the buna qala, while the mother of the family (Asafa's mother) anoints the cow. She spreads the milk over the cow's back with tchokorsa grass. Finally the cow's head is anointed and she is given some buna qala to eat.

38. A killer's mother anoints her son and his companions with butter. The killer is seated to the right of his companions and keeps his trophies, the buffalo's head, heels and tails, between his legs.

39. The successful buffalo-killer with his proud mother and his trophies.

40. A ritual at the clearing of a new plot of land. After the sacrifice of a black sheep for Waqa (God/sky) a tree is anointed with the sheep's blood.

41. Matcha men returning from a feast.

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This book is a pathbreaking and absorbing survey of the religious life, concepts, and worldview of the Matcha Oromo of Wälläga province. – Pathbreaking, because it contains the first substantial study of Oromo religion that has appeared for a long time, taking the views and statements of the Oromo themselves as the first source; absorbing, because this book is an inspired, sincere, and very interesting account, that evokes deep admiration. . . . It is an invaluable sourcebook containing many new data (prayers, texts, native explanations, stories, ritual formula, etc.) and as such it is a work to read and consult many times. It is destined to become a classic.

J. Abbink in *Anthropos* 1985

This is in many ways an admirable book. It demonstrates the author's command of the Oromo language, and his love for the Oromo people. This together with his choice of able assistants and the considerable latitude he gave them to articulate their own religious concepts, his fascinating observation of numerous ceremonies and his excellent interpretation of them, all make this an invaluable and much needed work of reference on the study of Oromo society.

Mohammed Hassen in *Man* 1985

This book belongs squarely in the rich tradition of Catholic missionary-anthropology . . . It is a treasure-house of carefully and lovingly gathered detail on the rituals and beliefs of the western Matcha Oromo, in the main as they are reconstructed as "tradition" in conversations with both younger and older informants. . . . this study, dedicated to the Oromo people, is a valuable document of their current quest for an authentic and self-identifying past.

Wendy James in *Journal of Religion in Africa* 1987

Rev. **Lambert Bartels**, born in 1915, is a member of the Vincentian Fathers. He studied anthropology in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Since 1967 he lives as a missionary and an anthropologist among the Oromo people. In the course of these fifteen years, Rev. Lambert Bartels published several articles in anthropologaical reviews such as in *Ethnology* and *Anthropos*.